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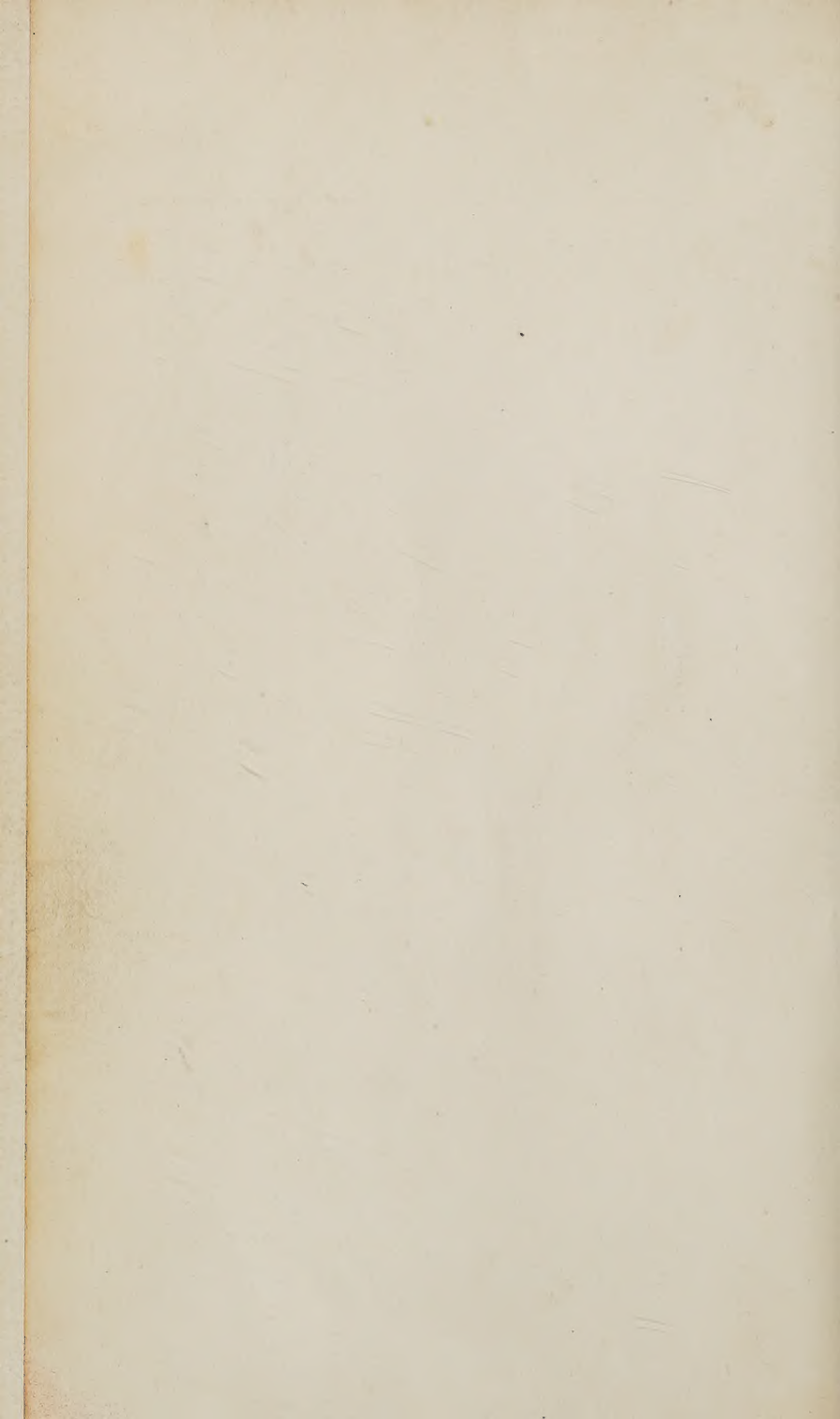
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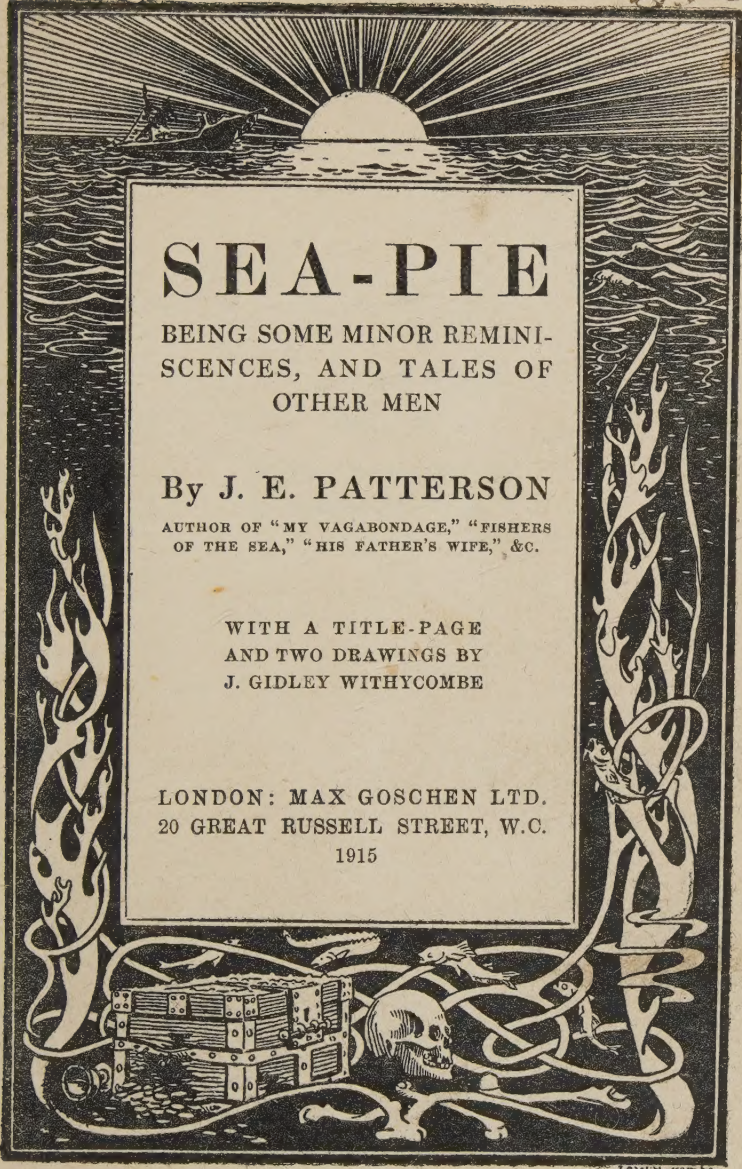
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"SHIVERS"

(As described by the Author to the Artist.)

A. 1973
B. 1955



SEA-PIE

BEING SOME MINOR REMINI-
SCENCES, AND TALES OF
OTHER MEN

By J. E. PATTERSON

AUTHOR OF "MY VAGABONDAGE," "FISHERS
OF THE SEA," "HIS FATHER'S WIFE," &C.

WITH A TITLE-PAGE
AND TWO DRAWINGS BY
J. GIDLEY WITHYCOMBE

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TO
AUNTIE
(M. I. J. H.)
WITH AFFECTIONATE
REMEMBRANCES



PREFACE

Personality : Not human only : Seeming contradictions : the
dominant "I" : Individuality uncontrollable : Tale-tellers :
At the bivouac of life : Gathering "copy" : A long memory :
Questioning the unknown : Giving and taking : A Sea-pie.

IT is a pleasing fact to me that these further reminiscences—minor in so far as they are my own—are mainly from the tongues of other men. Possibly the reader mutters : " Why pleasing ? " and is prepared with more pertinent questions. Well, this is a rather delicate matter ; more, it is an intricate one. However, having adventured the bark of my opinion into what may be rough waters (like Wolsey's wanton boys with bladders), I will endeavour to sail onward.

Personality is a curious feature in the living ego, and it is not confined to humanity. I have found it as strongly pronounced in cats, dogs, horses, and monkeys as in men and women. And I am convinced that it is the same from a mouse to an elephant, from a newt to a crocodile, from a tomtit to an eagle ; and probably even a fish has, amongst his own kind, sufficient individuality to single him out clearly from his fellows. No man's skin will fit another person ; it would be too tight in places and baggy in others, and this applies equally to that inner man—the real man, out of which comes the ego

which we now describe as personality. This is merely a fact that is demonstrated daily. But another fact, which so many of us fail, or refuse, to recognize, is that in every ego there are traits which seem to contradict each other directly ; and the more marked the ego is, the greater does the contradiction appear to be. Take such stupendous inspirations as the Bible, the Tripitaka, the Zend-Avesta and Shakespeare, the conflicting puzzle to average minds is that those books contain what, to them, are absolute inconsistencies. The make-up of a given personality is such that it needs must work, and be through and by that work, ever in the limelight of publicity, yet abhor the repeated use of " I," and even dislike the light itself. Nor is it allowed to many of us to write or speak continuously under the domination of that flagrant letter, and still make it evident that some of the saving grace of diffidence and the recluse is left in us.

The majority of men and women, even in these days of freedom and licence, are outwardly what the opinions of their fellows make them. It is only the odd ones, the "individualities," who can mould opinions by what they are—even when they are not all that they seem to be. I to myself am in myself my law, each of these odd ones says in effect ; but he is not, for in and about and through him there is at work a hidden something, an inexplicable force that mends while it appears to mar, shapes, and often finishes other than what he determined on at the outset, things whereof he thought himself the architect and the workman. So it is with the " I "

dominant. How frequently does the narrator use it in a common way, meaning only that it shall be read thus, nor thinking that it can be taken otherwise (except by a mind that is kinked with perversions) to find, alas ! after all, running through from “ I ” to “ I,” subtly underlying the whole matter (like a sub-surface current to a navigator in a strange sea) there is that previously-unsuspected, that uncontrollable something, whereat the flippant throw their cheap jests, and wherein the more penetrating and respectable minds see silently that which the narrator would fain have kept from the garish light of public inquisitiveness—even though he is largely made of the stuff of public men. Hence again I say I am pleased that the major part of these reminiscences are here set down mainly, and in their facts entirely, as they were told to me.

As to the original tellers : Who that has travelled far, that has mingled much with men in out-of-the-way places, on the high seas in quiet dog-watches lit by a tropic moon, in caravanserais (eastern and western), by camp-fires, in hospital and elsewhere; men of nearly all nationalities, some born to the hard and roving life, others bred into it by preference, some again forced there by untoward circumstances and showing generally by act and word that they were fish of other waters and never at ease properly in their present one, “ come-downers ” in whose blood the song of the Avernus highway was ever ringing, natural cut-throats from both up and down the social ladder, timid wayfarers—derelicts on the swift and turbulent stream—whose being there was

an intense puzzle to all but the few who looked for the hidden springs of surface-matters, astute minds and occasionally gifts out of place for lack of ambition or opportunity or because of temporarily foiled efforts : Who, I ask, that has voyaged and footed it amongst the infinite variety of such men, but has garnered up a store of tales, of experiences, of personalities, of the rough usage of the "destiny that shapes our ends" so frequently to the opposite of what we try to make them, of the terrible depths to which human nature sinks now and then, and of the transcending nobility that it displays in times and places when and where it is least expected.

During sixteen or seventeen years of nomadic life it fell to my lot to mix with more such men than recollection can recall. And, ever with an eye to "characters" and an ear for stories, I was there, noting points in the former and drinking in the latter as though they were my daily food and none so hungry as I. At times, too, I spent the watch-below in writing down the tales, &c., that I heard, personalities with whom I met, and things I saw, all in to-be-continued volumes of a long-extended "Journal," the fate of which is recorded in "My Vagabondage." But the memory that committed only five mistakes in making a sketch-plan of a large English village—with all its surface-contours, houses, roads, lanes, fields, paths, &c.—after thirty-eight years of absence, will not, I trust, be much at fault in recounting what circumstances and other men stamped upon it during the impressionable stages of youth and early manhood.

And if occasionally a little doubt should creep in as to this or that incident (alas, how human we are!) pray you, reader, put it down rather to my manner of re-telling the story than to the facts out of which it came. Remember that there are more things in the seas and a larger variety of men's doings thereon than are dreamt of in the circumscription of the home-keeper. Even a lark at its highest, or a hawk on fluttering wings looking for prey far below him, cannot know the giddy eeriness or the proud sense of greater things which are the daily experiences of an eagle. I would ask leave also to put forward the plea that in re-telling each story I have aimed chiefly at conveying to the reader a definite impression of the original narrator and how he told his tale—never, alas! with the success desired—except, perhaps, in the case of “Shivers,” whose stories are given exactly in his own manner and style of wording. However, be they what they may in literary value, I offer these reminiscences—more for the whiling away of idle hours than as serious reading—confident that the milk of human kindness will, by allowing a little latitude, add a softening flavour to the pen that strives to be truthful even in its endeavours to be interesting.

Then the title of the book: Here, happily, we touch something lighter—something far more appetising, to a healthy palate, at least; although the original would probably not be lighter to the digestion of the average townsman. “Sea-Pie” is no imitation of an excellent and well-known annual publication; but the name of a nautical *olla podrida*

that is common to every British, American and Colonial galley the world around, and to some foreign ones. With the exception that there were no "decks," and that fish took the place of meat, in Skipper Rasen's great achievement, that vividly remembered "dish" was largely a sea-pie. The real thing, however, is made by layering the bottom of a big fish kettle with a well-seasoned mixture composed of small cubes of lean meat of different sorts, onions, vegetables and peas or beans. This is covered entirely with a slab of paste (the "deck"); another layer follows, then another slab, and so on to a "three-decker" or a "four-decker," according to the number of hungry men and boys who await it in impatience. Finally, a hole is made through the middle of the "decks" and layers, for the purpose of supplying each "deck" with boiling water during the two to three hours of cooking. And if this literary sea-pie—or nautical hotch-potch—should prove to be even half so appetising to those to whom it is served in all diffidence, the cook will be quite satisfied.

J. E. P.

LEIGH-ON-SEA,

February 1915.

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SEA-PIE

O for the sea!—the wild, wide sea!

The breeze that whistles a weird sea tale;

The shark that waits, the heart that hates,

And the spectre grim at the leeward rail!

CHAPTER I

Deep-sea fishing : The prejudices of youth : A fine run : Optimism and possibilities : Hove-to : A bad haul : Better luck : A forced heave up : The price of fish : My first gale : A storm dinner : The gale increases : Lost sails : A heavy sea : Overboard ? : A disabled craft : Fair fishing : Another breeze : Lost gear : A wild demon on board : A lame duck.

It was about three o'clock on a frosty morning in November 1877, and the *Egeria's* hand-worked capstan palls fell with a sharp click-clack! click-clack! that sounded masterly imperative in the keen air and the general silence of Grimsby Fish Dock. After washing down chunks of soft bread and cold beef with mugsful of hot, rank coffee, we (six hands—the skipper-owner, mate, third-hand, two deck-hands, and the boy-cook—I, maker of the coffee and many a worse concoction) were heaving our seventy-ton smack down to the lock-pit. With the discomfort and the sleepiness worn off we younger ones buckled to the task readily enough, for we were a hardy, willing lot who worked well together. Besides, with our past voyage's spending-money gone, we knew

that we must away to sea for more, or sit at home, miserable, in the evenings. To the others—the two elders, who were also of cheery natures—outside there were fish and a living, even if at times a scarcity of the former made the latter a rather poor one ; inside the Humber's mouth there were bills to pay, mouths to feed, chimney-pots to fall about one's head in breezes, and no money to be earned except by landmen.

In those days only a few smacks had steam-driven capstans ; they all depended on sail, and from the first day of October to the last of March—sometimes well into April—life on that bitter North Sea was a hard struggle against adverse elements, such a struggle as only dominant perseverance and the optimism of youth could tackle with success. To the majority of us youngsters, however, and to some grown men whom I met in those years, life on shore was a miserable hand-to-mouth existence from the cradle to the grave—a string of frothings and wearyings, of coughs and hollow cheeks, of petty jealousies and family bickerings. Beyond the Humber there might be chilled limbs and the straining of muscles, discomfort at times and occasionally danger ; but with those features of the life we had freedom from callous competition and largely from the envy of one's fellows. There we got a glow on our cheeks, rude health in our minds and bodies, and had the joyous feeling of a bounding craft under our feet. On land it was a case of lingering sicknesses and slow death ; out there—a speedy severance, if the end came there, then a long, long rest.

So to the harvesting of the sea went the lively little *Egeria* and her hopeful, toiling, jesting crew. With a westerly breeze at her heels and all her lower sails set, she—rather skittish, but a good sea-boat—romped away for the tail-end of the Dogger Bank. The hatches were battened down; the decks were cleared-up; the watch was set, and land was out of sight, when the morning broke—cold, blustering, drizzly, and I was sent below to make more bad coffee and fry bacon, also ship's biscuits well-soaked in sea-water, for breakfast. Eastward the sun came up, angry-red from a dull, broken ridge of clouds which were tipped and banked with sinister tints of green, amber and greyish-pink, telling of toil and trouble later on. Ah, where ignorance is bliss, bliss is dearer far than knowledge! We were fresh from re-fitting the vessel for the rough usage to which she would be put by the mauling of a winter-lashed North Sea.

As a crew we were young. We came of that fraternity of which the Duke of Connaught (King Edward's brother) spoke of, as "the finest body of hardy men on whom I have ever looked." Our blood ran riot with health, optimism and blessed blindness as to difficulties. What to us, then, would it matter if the so-called German Ocean churned up its paly-green waters into big, broken seas, at the whipping of some "hard blow"? In that case we—the younger ones—would but get a night or two's rest from the trawl, hurry about the deck more quickly, beat our mittened fingers the more to make them warm, and find greater enjoyment by the fire in our dark, smoky, little cabin. Again, a "blow" might

bring us a prize in the shape of some dismasted timber-drogher from the Baltic, with her short-handed crew of mixed Scandinavians feverishly clinging to life, yet half afraid to risk themselves,* over the intervening white-capped waters, in our small boat, to the safety of the duck-like smack.

And so she rolled and ran through the running, seething mass, straining her sheets to the utmost, cracking the back of her big mainsail now and then like the sound of a wind-god's whip; while spluttering through the scuppers and rippling across the deck—as she heaved lightly this way or that—came the icy water that went unheeded, so long as sea-boots did not leak. Our skipper had selected the Dogger in order to try to secure a ton or two of its fine, large plaice, which were in a most excellent marketable condition at that time of the year—also, owing to their annoying habit of moving about in small shoals, mostly as difficult to catch. At midday we brought her to the wind, took in a reef, set a smaller jib, and let her go again. At sundown—a leaden hue splashed and streaked with forbidding red—she was hove-to, with another reef down, in a breeze that was too strong for trawling and a sea which she rode easily while close hauled, even though it had threatened to sweep her decks when it ran at her counter.

We youngsters slept the night through, to discover that the wind had fined away on the following morning. More labour, more courses, and off she went

* This was at that time the general way in which Humber fishermen looked on and talked of the foreign sailors whom they rescued in this manner winter after winter.

again. It was late in the afternoon when we once more hove-to, this time for the purpose of taking soundings. When the lead found bottom, the blue thirteen fathom mark played hide-and-seek with the waning daylight at the water's edge. But that tabooed number was not counted as unlucky by Humber fishermen, although their superstitions were many, varied and pronounced.

Being where the skipper would have us be, the trawl was prepared, "shot" (*i.e.* eased away to the bottom of the sea), and hove up again at midnight. It was not a good "bag" that greeted the eyes of its big-booted, oilskin-wearing haulers, whose fingers were numbed and stiffened with the cold, and whose arms ached to limpness. The trawl was split from foot-rope to "flapper"—rent by some cruel obstacle on the floor of the sea, likely enough the piece of a smack that once sailed cheek-by-jowl saucily with the *Egeria*; but finally went to the bottom with all hands. For this the "third-hand," who had had charge of the watch, got a "wiggling" from the skipper, because he had not noticed the "pull-out" when the trawl came foul of its barrier. But, in justice to him, owing to the freshness of the breeze a heavier drag at the warp might not have attracted a sharper man's attention. Growls were useless. There was a rough, first-hand philosophy, even in North Sea fishermen. Work was to be done—at once, quickly, and to make willing hands there must be smoothness in dealing. I and a deck-hand were told off to fill needles with twine; and, in the fitful glimmering of candles in deck-lanterns, the task of lacing up the rent was

tackled. Meanwhile the *Egeria* drifted along with her tiller lashed and fore-sheet a-weather, one of the crew occasionally going to the lea-bow to take a look ahead over the dark, white-spotted, heaving waters. When the temporary patching was done, the trawl again went down, this time off the starboard side, with a lee-tide running. When morning came again we were rewarded with a "bag" of plaice and a good sprinkling of turbot, brill, and cod. After the fish were put below and iced, all hands were kept busy at properly mending the torn trawl with tarred twine, until mid-afternoon, with our blood chilled and our optimism at zero. How easy it is to be young when the heart is light !

Thus, with varying luck, were four days and nights spent. Then there came a change. From west to nor'-nor'-east the wind veered, "chopped," veered again, took on a squally nature, and made trawling a thing of impotent anger, disappointments, and vain efforts. The fish-room, that promised soon to be in a pleasing state of fullness, lacked a few good hauls to make returning home a profitable undertaking. Again, it was the second half of night. The gear was down. Squalls had alternated into a freshening breeze that thrashed the waters into streaks of foam, sent biting sprays across the smack's low decks, and threatened to be a gale before day broke. The mate, then in charge of the watch, came below, awoke the skipper, quietly told him what the weather was like, then returned to his duty on deck. With feet hastily thrust into a pair of "clumpers" (heavy, lumbering slippers, made by cutting the tops off old sea-boots),

the skipper followed, to examine the weather for himself. The result was that old, familiar, disquieting, loud call in the cabin :

Haul, haul, haul the trawl here O !

And out from our stuffy bunks we tumbled, dressed in all but boots and sou'westers, as fishermen ever are when sleeping aboard in winter. Within three minutes the warp was at the capstan, and click . . . clack ! . . . click . . . clack ! . . . click . . . clack ! round it went slowly in the whistling wind, the intense cold, and the pitchy darkness, with now and then a quick clatter of its palls, when a fathom or two of warp was run in as the *Egeria* rolled to windward ; and over it all from time to time came those keen, icy sprays, the very hiss of which sent shivers down our backs.

Is it a cause for wonder that the North Sea fisherman is hard as the winter weather of his working grounds ? Well fed on plain, wholesome food, from early boyhood trained to the hardships of his calling, wind-beaten and sea-buffed into robustness, by nature forced into privations and long strains, he stands the pick of health, the personification of indomitable energy—let his faults in the by-walks of life ashore be what they may.

Thus we kept to our slow grind at the capstan, now getting in our trawl-warp, then losing fathoms of it as a heavy roller lurched the smack away to leeward ; now encouraging each other with the fact of our having recovered the lost and gained a little to the good ; then setting our teeth hard together and

gripping the capstan, as could be done only by men who instantly expected to be torn away—to Heaven alone knew where—in the numbing, curling embrace of an inrushing sea.

Ah ! the lives that have paid for the silver “ caller herrin’,” for the plaice and the haddock and the cod ! Not all the high-priced markets, money-glutted, under God’s sky, could pay for a tithe of them ! Think of it, dwell on it, ye who eat your fish and think poorly of the humble men who caught it ! Better a thousand times that you bow your heads and reverently pray : “ Father, be good to Thy fishermen. Christ Himself worked amongst them, voyaged with them, loved them. Thy other wanderers over the deep can up helm and bear away when breezes freshen into gales. But they, the fishermen, they must lie and wait on their grounds for better weather ; or venture, work, and maybe go down working.”

Darkness still lingered over the smack. The breeze stiffened. Canvas, reduced at midnight, had to be further lessened. The warp was secured at its capstan, and all hands again tackled the work of reefing and putting out the storm-jib, during which it fell to my lot (as it always did to the boy-cook) to climb into the turned-up foot of the mainsail, in order to pass the reef-lacing (a thin line) through each hole in the sail, with the continual expectation of being flung out, on to the deck or overboard, every time the sail shook in the wind. Then throughout the remaining hours of darkness, the steadying gale, and the whipping of bitter sprays, we hove and hauled, hauled and hove, till dawn—grey, ragged,

and biting—broke sullenly over the angry scene, to the roaring accompaniment of an occasional watery threat to give us a quick descent to the wild sea's floor. With the first slow, hardly noticeable creeping presence of that thin, opalescent, brine-saturated light our trawl lay on the deck, chafed, torn, and empty.

That was my first Gale. I give precedence to that Gale, out of sheer respect for it. Yet, truth to tell, it was far more a cause of ME, while the Gale lasted, than of it ; for wherever I went, or whatever I did—trying to cook a meal, washing-up, lying in my cupboard-like bunk, or peeping fearsomely over the edge of the companion-hutch—there was no one so present to me as I. All that day the wind held on steadily—a hard, two-reefed breeze that rolled up a sea as big as the Dogger Bank would allow to run over it without breaking continually. It was due to the height of sea that I shared one of the strangest olla podridas that ever came out of a saucepan. The fresh meat was always kept in the ice-room, on the foreshore of the fish-room, both of which compartments extended across the vessel ; but there was no getting at that till the sea went down, and as the harness-cask was in the forehold, battened down, with an impassable bulkhead between the meat and us, the question arose : What were we to have for dinner ?

The skipper (on the lee-locker in the dim cabin) and the mate (on the weather-side, and preventing himself from being flung at the skipper by keeping the sole of his sea-boot against the iron 'mid-ship stanchion) discussed the situation ; while

one deck-hand and I sat in the steerage without, talking "with bated breath and whispering humbleness" of the gale, and the other deck-hand perched in the companion-way, his head just outside the hutch, and the only one above the deck, watching the rush and splutter of bewildering, greenish-grey seas which, in another sense, were magnificent from our bibbity-bobbity coign of vantage. The great trouble was that we had no meat except bacon for dinner, which was almost worse than the gale. After some talk and a minute's silence the mate absent-mindedly suggested a sea-pie.

"What, without meat?—A sea-pie without meat?" skipper Rasen queried, and to this day I can hear the startled, scornful ring in his voice.

All apparent ways and means to a satisfactory dinner had been touched upon, and still the all-important matter was unsettled, when the skipper called out:

"Have you any fish, boy?"

"Only dabs and gurnets," I answered; it being my duty to pick out from the haul and prepare such fish for breakfast on the following morning.

The answer was, "Damn it, done again!"

Then from the bunk of the third-hand (where we all thought him to be asleep, yet should have known better, because his regular-irregular, up-and-down-the-scale snoring had ceased at about the question of a sea-pie without meat) there came sleepily, "There's two young cod in the stern of the boat."

"And who the devil left two young cod in the stern of the boat instead of putting 'em below?"

rapped out the skipper, in light anger at this laxity in duty.

“I did,” was the drowsy, imperturbable answer, followed similarly by, “and now we can have ’em for dinner, so be thankful and shut up, and let me get some sleep.”

We heard him turn over on his straw mattress as the skipper muttered something about “back answers,” then ordered the cod to be brought below.

After some remarks and suggestions as to how best to get the fish, a reef-lacing was hitched around the waist of Brown, the elder deck-hand. While the mate stood in the companion-hutch and slacked away, then gathered in the line, Brown ran uncertainly to the stern of the small boat and returned with the cod—to be half-thrown, half-slid off his feet, when he was near the hutch, and flung into the lee-scutters ; but he clung to the fish, and the mate hauled him into safety.

Then the skipper, as chief cook, with me as his erring, rated, unsatisfactory stoker and attendant generally, began to make his wonderful dish, which was long afterwards known both as “Rasen hash” and “*Egeria* hash.” But if the nymph of the grotto ever repudiated anything, on account of its being non-classical, I should think it was our olla podrida that day. I could no more mention everything there was in it than I could say whether there are harps or not in Heaven. I know that it contained one pint of sea-water to six of fresh, pepper, mustard, slices of lean bacon (the maker of the dish was not a gross feeder), the remains of a tin of corned beef, onions,

potatoes, green peas (blue ones, which had been soaking in water and soda all the night), the fins, heads and tails of the cod (the bodies being kept back as a stand-by for the following day), and small suet-dumplings with tiny cubes of bacon in them. The receptacle was our big, square fish-kettle, in which many a three-decker sea-pie had been made. It was nearly thrown off the fire in several of the *Egeria's* heavy lurchings, and was almost full. After about an hour and a half of cooking—during which I had been rated from the purgatory of uselessness to the Fiddlers' Green (ten miles beyond Hell, so the sailor says) of downright, damnable idiocy, mostly with a laugh, however—the pottage smelt so to my shipmates' heavens of gastric delight that Brown called wildly from the hutch, while the other three sat around the fire, smacking their lips, making the half-dark, overheated cabin resound with their approbation, and incessantly asking for "some of it." In passing, I must record my sense of the nicety with which each ingredient was added to the mess, both as regarded its quantity and the time allowed it, so that everything should be finished cooking exactly at twelve o'clock. It always stands out to me as one of the three made-up dishes of my life ; when thinking of it both in times of dyspepsia and in hours of fullness I have felt hungry.

On the feast that followed I would rather allow the reader's imagination to play, than spoil a great scene by trying vainly to put it into words. Enough and to the gale's despite, there were no two sittings on that day. We made one mess of it—that is, Brown

was allowed a small basinful up in the hutch ("to keep his nose warm," the skipper said), while Nixon—his fellow of the deck—filled up with the others below, then relieved Brown to go to the cabin and fill up also. The one course was enough. Had the sweets of a houri's repast been there they would have gone untouched. When the unholy rite was over, the skipper stretched himself mutely and humbly on the lee-locker, and we four could only look at each other in the silence of repletion.

Thus much, for the time being, did we think of or heed the gale; nor was this an isolated instance of such conduct in similar circumstances. It fell to my lot subsequently to be many a time one of a group—seldom the whole crew—who went through worse weather, with practically the sea gaping under us, while devoting our attentions to the best meal attainable, spinning yarns—the most of which were deplorable—or in playing euchre for small squares of cake-tobacco or pieces of clothing, or for money that would be ours on pay-day, but was never paid to the winners who won in silence, as others lost and cursed while the storm raged.

Yet though we went heedless of the gale during that gargantuan dinner, and were pitched and tossed enough to shake down two such meals, the gale had not done with us—as we all realized in moments of less fullness and more thought, when the faint, lingering, dull light of day was about to leave us. The wind was coming with the night—from the east-north-east, or thereabouts. Away the lee-quarter, day was vanishing in a cold grey mist—repelling

enough in itself, but immensely cheering when contrasted with the opposite side of the horizon. Here the grey darkened to an absolute leaden hue, of which the grim relentless complexion—so to write—sent a decided chill to the hearts of us three youngsters. Of sky there was not a hand-patch to be seen. The sun had left behind it, for a few minutes, a small mass of greyish fiery colouring. Even the waters spoke of the approaching war among the elements. I did not then understand it; but experience teaches us how to read many of Nature's communications. I clearly remember how they frothed and fretted; how, despite the strengthening wind, they flung themselves in all directions.

Before daylight went, the smack was reduced to her storm allowance of sail, and the trawl was pulled off the rail and stowed in the scuppers. Things generally were made comparatively secure, and all, except the one-man-watch, went below to the cabin and tea. After the meal the skipper told us boys to get into our bunks at once, for we were likely to be called at any moment. The mate he also advised to turn in without delay, saying that even he might be wanted before midnight, when his watch-out would commence. Accordingly, we soon made ourselves scarce; and a considerable time I spent in watching, from my oblong box with its sliding-door, the skipper lying and smoking on the opposite fore-and-aft locker. As matters happened, we were not needed till about half-past one in the morning. Then the whole crew was again required to refix and secure the small boat, which a sea had cast loose and brought

along the deck. It is impossible to describe what is meant by such a turning-out, putting on sea-boots and oilskins, and creeping up into the pitch-darkness.

How the wind whistled and howled. How the smack seemed to dance like a cork in her condition, now almost darting from under one's feet, then as unexpectedly and suddenly coming back. How the darkness appalled me, more than a great tomb would have done. How I thought each icy spray was the forerunner of a rolling sea that would sweep us all like matches into the seething, hissing, watery blackness under our lee ; and how I, shivering, catching my breath, eager to fall down the companion-ladder so be that I reached the cabin, darted from one vantage-post to another ! All this can but be guessed at. Enough, it ended in about an hour's time, and we returned to the cheering blaze of the fire below, to which I had taken care to attend as often as I could leave the work above. But the deck-hand (the youth) and I were not allowed to remain there long. By established custom we were the first to be called whenever the one-man-watch needed help, and this occurred thrice before daylight came.

While we were having breakfast, the jib bade us an eternal good-bye and left nothing but its framework of rope. Now there was a rush for the deck, followed by hurried endeavours to check the danger incurred by the blowing-away of the sail. This was done without the little craft shipping more water than a couple of heavy sprays. Yet no sooner was the jib replaced with a half-furled one of larger size, and a few lesser matters attended to, than a sea

came over the bows and tore the stay-foresail to tatters.

Again all hands were forward, bending a fresh staysail. A marlinspike was wanted to open the grummets on the sail, and I was sent for one. I knew one was usually kept in the binnacle-locker—a small trough-like shelf inside the companion-hutch—and sinking my knees to the step of the latter, the upper half of my body went into the hutch, and I reached for the 'spike.

At that instant the *Egeria* took a great sea over her rail, just abaft the fore-rigging. What happened in the next two or three minutes I never knew. The shock had thrown me backwards a little, and the first clear idea that dawned on me was that I had a firm hold on the edge of the hutch, which I then supposed to be broken away. How the change in my position had come about heaven alone knew. There I was, seemingly afloat with the hutch, while the smack appeared to be sinking beneath me. "Well, I have something to float with," was the only thought in my mind. But this idea was soon dissipated. I found that the vessel was no more than partially submerged, and was coming to her old bearings as fast as she could.

Now I saw four of my shipmates—three on the bow and one at the stern. In two huge volumes the water was pouring into the hold and down the companion-way, while from the latter rushed smoke and steam. The cabin funnel was gone from my side, leaving the lower pipe some four inches above the deck, and down it the water streamed. Our small

boat was broken from its moorings again, stove in, and now turned bottom upwards on the capstan, well-nigh across the deck. There was a large rent in the mizzen-sail. The main-boom was broken in the middle ; the half hanging to the clew of the sail being completely overboard, while the goose-necked part at the mast was poked through a break in the lee-bulwarks.

Now the waters were subsiding from us, and we gathered our strength for the new work. Scarcely had we done so when a second sea broke on board abaft the waist. What the others did was wholly their affair ; mine was a mad leap at the companion-way. When next aware of my actual surroundings I lay on my back at the foot of the steerage ladder ; where, as the vessel rolled from side to side, the ice-cold water poured down on me. A move caused the discovery of a fierce pain in my shoulder and right arm ; also a most tender soreness at the back of my head. On crawling away from the falling water I saw Nixon huddled up in a lee-corner, silent, and looking dead.

In a few minutes the mate came down, dragged us both into the cabin, ascertained that my chum was stunned, said my shoulder was out of joint, and returned to help with the work above. Presently Nixon revived, got himself a drink of water and gave me one ; then he sat down a little while, after which he went on deck again. My arm proved, by-and-bye, to be only wrenched, but so severely that I could not use it for some days. Noon came before the smack was again in a workable condition. Then the

fire was re-lit (the funnel having been found under the trawl to leeward), food was prepared—the “hash” of the previous day going round to the extent of a moderate plateful each—and we awaited the lessening of the gale. This devoutly-desired blessing came as the day left us. At midnight it was a case of all hands make sail to keep the vessel steady. After breakfast more canvas was needed. From that afternoon we enjoyed three nights and days of fairly even fishing; then, on the fourth evening, the trawl was once more “shot”—to our after-sorrow; for, ere day dawned on us again, we were to have most telling occasions for wishing the gear back in its place on the smack’s side. But as she tugged at her two tons of fishing machinery, at the end of fifty fathoms of warp, we thought not of the sorrows of our lives as represented by the extra hardships of our calling. Nor was the general weather-aspect on that evening of a kind to give us much pause in the rude enjoyment and common hurly-burly of our life and work. Nature put her shrouding-time, her sleep-cloth about us; the evening meal was eaten, the watch changed, and the night proper began.

Near nine o’clock (the time is not marked by “bells” on a smack, as aboard a merchant-vessel) the wind veered, became stationary at nor’-nor’-west, there sharply freshened into a half-gale; and we, after twice reducing sail during the next three hours, tackled the task of once more reclaiming our trawl from those wild waters, ere the weather should become too heavy for such an undertaking. And what

a task it was! How we hove! How the elders cursed, as the enlarging seas came down on us, sweeping the smack to leeward and tearing out the warp, which we had so exerted ourselves to get in! How the icy sprays spat in keen impotence on our oilskins, some drops occasionally finding entrance between collar and sou'-wester! How the heavier seas from time to time tore on board, pouring into the hold, and making us cling for sweet life to any secure object at which we could separately leap. How the gale increased in weight and coldness, chilling us to the marrow, taking from us the strength that we so needed for the work, and finding the weak spots in our sails! Then came rain—fine, blinding, penetrating; so cold and ruthlessly driven by the wind that it stung the skin wherever it struck. Twice a short debate was held on the advisableness of letting the gear go, in the interests of the smack herself and our own safety. Twice, in sheer doggedness and biting determination not to be beaten, the almost hopeless task was resumed. Through it all the blackness of that November night clung like a numbing death-pall about us, making it impossible for us to see more than the outline of a thing a fathom away.

In the lightless hold I tugged at the warp from the capstan, my puny strength shrivelled up in the grip of the terror of my position. Nixon "pulled back" for me at the capstan, at the iron handles of which the others strained their utmost, ever alert for an in-boarding sea, that might come at any moment and sweep them into the hissing, seething oblivion then raging immediately beyond our lee-rail. And one such

came, doing evil work, despite our precautions and attempts to cheat the thing. The seaman, especially the man accustomed to small craft, knows by instinct when his vessel is about to be struck by a sea. The vessel herself seems to have a feeling of what is coming. An ominous quiver, wholly imperceptible to the landsman, though he may have done a dozen passages in a western ocean greyhound, runs through her, giving her living parts a premonition to seek cover. This we felt, and the five on deck dashed for firm holding-places ; but too late. Over the after-part of the weather-bow it came—a mass of mad, rushing, swirling, black-green water, ice-cold. It took them in its seeking, twisting, powerful arms as though they were but young haddocks in the tentacles of a mighty octopus, and it the most fiendish thing that ever had life ; tearing them from their holdings like autumn leaves from branches tossed in an angry advance of winter ; blinding, choking, and deafening them, as they were swept hither and thither in the wild swirl and the sudden more light-some toiling of the smack (for the big heave to leeward, as the sea struck her, had parted the trawl-warp on the gangway) ; pouring down the hold, from which went up my thin shouts, under the impression that the vessel was filling ; flooding the cabin and putting its fire out ; making a mad wreckage of our bulwarks and deck-fittings, and rushing a host of things into the wild sea to leeward, whither it had sent our boat from the deck at its first inrush—while the gale howled a fierce accompaniment, a hellish, shrieking requiem that smothered the cries for help.

When the sea lingeringly cleared us, lo, what a change was there ! Our hatches, companion, skylight had gone after the boat. The gale streamed out the shreds of our main- and foresails. I was found insensible on the coil of warp below, my legs in some eighteen inches of water. All the others were bruised severely, and one had been snatched back as the water was carrying him over the lee-rail. All that could be done for the safety of the vessel, we did. In hunger, bitter cold, hard pumping, and preparedness to die, we passed the slowness of those black hours.

Morning came, grey, with much less wind and a sullen sea. Then there was much toiling, straining, and ingenuity to patch up broken places ; to spread sufficient canvas to send the poor lame duck on her way home, and at a speed quick enough to enable her to get out of the way of the seas, *i.e.* so that they would not roll over her as if she were a log.

CHAPTER II

Running for home : Tales by the way : Shipping blasphemy :
Beginning a big run : A joyful prospect : Checkmating a
boaster : Spume and moonlight : The boaster puzzled : Com-
ments en route : Flying along : Tragic humour : Repairing
damage : Swearing : The boaster breaking : Luxuriance in
feeling : More flying : The boaster broken.

SHE was a poor, forlorn and bedraggled sort of North Sea nymph, that went heaving along indifferently before a still stiffish breeze, with the top of a sea now and then breaking over her weather-rail, and near enough to the companion-hutch to send some of its sharp spray down on to my rude preparations for the midday meal. This work was always carried on in the steerage directly underneath the hutch, and the pasteboard and what not were therefore spattered frequently with salt water and worse ingredients, because of all hands—often in fishy oil-skins—descending and in part disrobing right in the midst of it all. Seeing us go past, half-canvassed by ill-fitting sails that had been mended hurriedly and crudely with big pieces of older ones, other smacks came to ask if we needed towing. But, no—we could, or would, fetch home by our own exertions. Unkind fortune had already thrust enough and to spare of expense on the poor owner, who stood by the rail—six feet three inches in his thigh-boots—and shouted back his answer, with sad resolution, or merely shook

his head, then glanced from point to point of the *Egeria*, seeking where he could to mend matters, and finding none that were within the compass of his present means. If her namesake could have seen her limping along, her deep red-brown sails made ugly with patches of various lighter, weather-worn tints, she would have been ashamed to own her.

It was here that the mate shone, even as he had done in the bad things which we had left behind. Still but little over thirty years of age, under the medium in height and rather broad of figure, with kindly yet shrewd, grey eyes, and gingery hair around his face, he was a man of some education and not a little of a humorist. His name was Jasper "something" Pigeon. What the "something" was I forget; but it was a queer name out of which he often made fun, as he did out of his patronymic. Not that there was much wit in his jokes; the main point to us was that they raised many a laugh in tense times and lightened scores of heavy labours. And we enjoyed them on that limping run home; so did the skipper, for they were always genial, never forced nor in bad taste. But the best service he did to Skipper Rasen during those three days of weary crawling westward—for on the second one the wind annoyed us by falling away, then going ahead—was in an almost continuous spinning of yarns, mostly about his experiences in southern-going merchantmen and Baltic ice-barques, for he had been a sailor before he took to the better-paid though harder life on a smack.

The tale that I remember best, however, concerned, in particular, two Grimsby fishermen—men whom

I afterwards knew well, as I did the subordinate hands who sailed with them on the memorable voyage out of which the story came ; in fact, Pigeon was third-hand with them, thus the first complete recital in my hearing came from one who had played his part therein. It happened in this wise. On the afternoon of the second day a smack bore down on us and asked the usual question, got the same answer as the others had received and sheered off. Just as she rounded our stern and went away to leeward, the mate came on deck, looked at the stranger and said :

“ Why, that’s old Sam Green, isn’t it ? ”

“ Yes,” answered the skipper ordinarily. “ You sailed with him, didn’t you ? ”

“ Didn’t I just ! I was with him last spring, when he broke Scooter Jackson’s nerve. Biggest run a smack ever made ! ”

“ Yes, I’ve heard bits about it. And I believe Green could do it,” said the skipper, rather indifferently.

“ Do it ? He *did* it ! Why, it’s a glorious yarn. Come down, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

It was plain to me that our skipper cared but little whether he heard the whole story or not ; but listening to the mate’s well-told yarns was better than worrying over the damage to his vessel. So down they went—and I, ever eager for a story, quickly followed, to sit in the steerage and pretend to be busy with my duties (although this was my leisure part of the day), while I took in every word of the story, which I often heard afterwards and here reproduce with such circumstantial necessities as sea-experience and know-

ledge of the characters warrant, and without that circumlocution which would have to be used if it were given as from the mouth of the mate.

“Mornin’, Green.”

“Mornin’,” replied the skipper, straightening up from a heap of black, tarred net, and looking obliquely at the short, thick-set, gingery-faced man who had just boarded his vessel, as she lay at the quay-side.

“Mr. Binden’s told me as you’re wantin’ a mate.”

“Ay. What about it?” asked Skipper Green.

“Well, he thought as how you might give me the chance. There’s d——d mighty little doin’ now, an’ I’ve bin out ’n a berth these three weeks.”

Binden owned the smack; but the custom was for a skipper to engage his mate. The two men looked steadily at each other, after the stolid fashion of their kind; for, unlike Rasen and Pigeon, they were both of the older school of Humber fishermen. The shorter man had gained his nickname by some pretty frequent daredevil “scooting,” particularly when home-bound, by which means he had made some well-known fast passages and lost a few top-masts. But a run of ill-luck, ending in a collision that had cost him a six months’ suspension of his skipper’s certificate, had reduced him to shipping where he could as mate. Green, a big, well-set-up man of middle age, had borne the reputation in his younger days—when Scooter was an apprentice—of having “the biggest nerve in all the east coast skippers.” But reason had come with years; so that he now rarely “carried on” to any

foolhardy degree, and was known to be a "bit religious in a way."

"Rather funny as you should come to me for a berth, isn't it?" Green said, still gazing fixedly at the other.

"Funny? What the —— for?"

"Well, you knows well enough."

"What! 'bout Mrs. Green an' me!"

"Ay. Folks have hardly done sayin' you knowed more about her last summer 'an you ought to, have they?"

"Oh, them be d——d! That's all me boot!"

"Yes, you've said so all along. But never mind, she's not here now to speak for herself: so we'll let it go by."

In the height of the scandal, to which Green alluded, his wife—who had sacrificed affection by her lack of home-keeping, and was ten years younger than he—had died suddenly, while her husband was at sea. Scooter broke in with a lockerful of blasphemy as to his innocence, &c.; but the skipper cut him short with:

"Doesn't matter much now. Anyhow, I'll take you for a trip, an' we'll see how we gets on together."

Scooter, quite missing that little touch of grim pathos which marked Green's first four words, asked when the latter intended to put to sea. "Next tide," was the answer; and the new mate said he would go up home for his bag. He went, and Skipper Green became very thoughtful.

That evening the *Firefly* was bowling merrily along the coast, to the nor'rad. Green took her to the Faroe grounds, where, in spite of occasional bad

weather, they had the luck to fill up with fine fish. But there was one peculiarity about the skipper during this fortnight : he was unusually quiet, and the older hands in his crew remarked on it now and then. To Scooter this trait and Green's careful handling of the smack especially in the two breezes they had, were subjects of frequent sarcasm and evidence that "he was more fit for Sund'y-school work 'an skipperin'." His was too obtuse a mind to think that Green was all the time studying him, with the result that now, when the vessel was heading for home again, the skipper had come to the conclusion that his mate was a coward at heart and a rabid profligate to boot.

Full in the bilge and broad of beam, the *Firefly* was not one to make heavy weather of her nine to ten knots an hour and a following wind. So it was that the big, red-tanned, unreefed mainsail, and the smaller sails fore and aft, sent her cheerily along, with eased sheets and decks aslant just enough for the white foam to leeward to come spluttering regularly through the scupper-holes. And, big swearer and worse than he was, Scooter stood by the little skylight, admiring and enjoying her movements. He had hardly finished venting some of his red spleen on the skipper's carefulness, now that they were running for market, much to the dislike of Pigeon, who was at the tiller, and had some love for Green. At this juncture the latter came up the companion-way, walked to the mate's side and said :

"A nice breeze. She's doin' beautiful."

"Ay, but w'y the devil don't you run the topsel up, an' put a bigger jib on her an' let her go?"

“She’s goin’ enough. An’ there’ll be more wind afore night comes on,” answered the skipper quietly. Owing to Scooter having been a skipper, Green gave him more liberty of speech than he would otherwise have had.

“Goin’ enough!” said the other, scornfully, as he spat vehemently on the deck. “I’d make her damn-well scoot, you bet, if I was you!” and out came one of those oaths of which the skipper had already heard more than enough.

“M’m, would you? Better go an’ turn-in, I think. P’r’aps you’ll get plenty of it afore midnight.”

Laughingly saying, yet with an underlying, biting sarcasm, that *he* would not get enough of it before the *Firefly* reached harbour, the mate went below. For a few minutes Skipper Green kept his position, with legs wide apart to steady him on the leeward heaves of the vessel. His big, powerful hands were thrust deep into the pockets of his fearnought-trousers, and all his attention was on the sails and the weather. Then he turned about, stepped to the rail and quietly watched the weather horizon for perhaps five minutes.

“Ay,” he said, turning to his first position by the mainsheet-cleat, with his back to the helmsman, “we’ll get enough of it ’fore we’ve done with it, an’ a bit to spare for some of us—or I’m makin’ a pretty big mistake.” After a pause he added to himself, “M’m, yes—an’ now we’ll see who can scoot an’ say little, an’ who meddles with other men’s wives an’ who doesn’t.”

Then Skipper Green went below, carefully examined

his barometer, and called back to mind exactly how it had behaved since daybreak. He at once hunted out a screw-driver, took the instrument from its place on the cabin bulkhead and stowed it away in his private locker. He knew that glass as he knew himself, "better than he knew his mother," he often said. He was quite satisfied as to what the weather was going to be, and just as determined that no one else aboard the *Firefly* should know—not by his barometer, at any rate. His next move was to put his head out of the companion-way and call to the third-hand, "Let Tom (the deck-hand) go below, Jasper, till tea-time. He'll 'ave to take watch with the mate to-night."

"All right, skip'!" bawled Pigeon, now knowing that the *Firefly* was to be made to "scoot" in a way that would give the mate enough of it before morning came.

So that afternoon wore away. The sun sank low on the weather-horizon, red, clear and angry-looking, behind those big, white-crested rollers which came roaring down from the nor'-west—as if they had travelled thunderously from the Arctic, and were determined to go on till they tumbled, foaming, broken yet savage and clamorous, on the eastern shore of the North Sea. Six o'clock came, and Scooter was called to take his watch on deck. As he thrust his feet into long sea-boots, while sitting on the lee-locker in the cabin and reading the weather, &c., in the *Firefly's* movements, he said, quite cheerily to Pigeon, who had been relieved by the deck-hand:

"She's a-goin', then?"

“ Ay, an’ you’ll know it when you get to the tiller. If you don’t want some canvas off her before long my name isn’t what it is ! ”

Scooter’s reply was a red oath that *he* was the last one aboard *that* packet to want to shorten sail. The entrance of the skipper cut the conversation short. Tea was eaten in comparative silence. Then Scooter put a hawser-like muffler around his neck, hauled on a long oilskin smock, fixed a sou’-wester tightly on his head, lit a short, black, clay pipe—all being done without the least hurry—and said, “ Now for it ” ; then went on deck.

The *Firefly* was travelling—apparently just as I once raced over the same course and under like conditions. Scooter took the helm. To him, the scene spelt an exuberance of joy. This *was* “ going.” The sun had disappeared, leaving only a hard-looking, reddish-yellowness that was fast fading to a dark, indefinite grey-blue low down along the western horizon. Obliquely across this faint, changing light the seas came hurrying helter-skelter against the after-part of the smack’s tarred planks, then ran, combing and gamesome, with a strong suggestion of the panther in their frolic, along by her starboard rail, till they broke their heads near the weather-rigging and sprayed up the luff of the big mainsail, or careered gaily on ahead. Backed by the night sky in the south-east and those blackish, white-crested seas under the lee, the dark-red sails appeared to be of a coal-like colour, as they tugged and strained at their sheets and booms ; while along the lee-side there was a continual, yard-wide line of noisy, foaming water

that kept the scupper-holes full of a curious chuckle, came half-way up the bulwarks now and then and went racing astern as if it was a mountain torrent. Scooter was one of the happiest men on all the wide seas. Then the nine-days' old moon got up away under the lee, and as she climbed higher amongst the unclouded stars, the whole scene became a tremendous expanse of wild and moving beauty.

Presently Skipper Green came into the companion-way, and shouted aft, "Keep her at it! Tom 'll be up in a minute an' stand the watch with you! I'm goin' to turn-in on the lee-locker; but don't call me 'nless the wind shifts. We sha'n't shorten sail this watch!"

"All right! Let 'er rip! This is fair grand!" was the bawled reply, as the skipper disappeared below.

Then Tom came on deck again and took his stand by the weather-mizzen-rigging. Fortified by hot, strong tea, boiled salt beef and biscuits, and with plenty of dry woollen clothing under his oilskins and sea-boots, he was nothing loth—having had that afternoon spell below—to take a turn at night-duty; for Scooter was not a bad watch-mate. So through those white-lit hours and the rising sea, while the hard nor'-wester steadily increased to a half-gale, the *Firefly* raced along her southerly course. And Scooter could have sung for joy—till midnight drew near, when he began to think that the skipper would assuredly haul down a reef at the change of watches. To this end he told Tom to get the gear ready, and see that the halyards were all clear for lowering away.

Much to the mate's surprise, however, Skipper Green—who had taken a surreptitious peep at his barometer before he followed Jasper on deck, to share in the morning watch—made no reply to the query as to whether he would haul down a reef or not. Instead of answering directly, the skipper looked at the compass in the skylight, then glanced aloft, and said cheerily, as if to himself :

“ Beautiful ! She's doin' just beautiful—couldn't be better.” Then he added in a louder and different tone, “ What's the log say, Scooter ? ”

The mate, not knowing what to make of this, went aft and read the dial of the patent log by the light of that white moon and a feeble binnacle lamp. “ A hundred an' ten knots,” he replied.

“ Pretty fair, pretty fair, for a twelve hours' run ! But she'll do better 'an that yet. Get below you two, the boy's makin' you some tea.”

Having said this, the skipper passed for'ard, carefully to examine the halyards, hatches, &c. ; and keeping himself from going down into the lee-scuppers by moving quickly from one fixed object to another. He was glad at the thought that nearly all his ropes were new.

Scooter followed Tom below in silence ; and in silence he drank his tea, lit his pipe and turned-in. He was oppressed by the idea that there was something wrong with the skipper.

Still the *Firefly* held on her course, carrying quite a third more canvas than she could have done close-hauled. With her decks now at a sharpish angle, rarely heaving far to windward, her lee-side a smother

of water, and about her head all the time a thin cloud of fine spindrift, she roared away to the s'uth'ard as though she understood the necessity of getting a weather-shore in the shortest possible time. And still the breeze whistled its wild tune over the big, blue-green seas, like an invisible demon of immeasurable strength.

Towards morning, Skipper Green made another stolen examination of his "glass," and found that it had gone down a little. This rather disconcerted him. He went on deck, took a look around, and was afraid that the wind would presently veer to the north-east, giving him a lee-shore down the coast of Scotland, and probably some nasty squalls of sleet. Such a change would upset all his plans. He had thought of taking in a reef at the end of the watch. Now he decided to hold on, and let her smoke through it all, making the most of things while they held—provided that neither spars nor canvas carried away. But he would ease her a bit, all the same. So when he roused out Scooter and Tom, he also called the boy-cook, and told him to get ready a spanking breakfast of coffee and fried ham and fish. This was another surprise for the mate ; the usual breakfast hour being eight o'clock.

When all hands, except the boy, were on deck, just after daybreak, the skipper sent Scooter to the tiller—to which he had rigged a lee-and-weather tackle, in place of the hard-working single tiller-rope—and said :

"Come on, you two—we'll house that top-mast, an' ease her 'ead a bit. Up you go, Tom—an' soon

as the fid's out stow it well and slither down again sharp."

Within ten minutes the work was done, and the skipper and his two hands were aft again. "Now," he remarked, "we'll reef the mizzen, an' that'll make her steer better."

This was as quickly done; then the mate put in, "But you're a-goin' to reef the mainsel! Ain't you?"

"No——"

"My G——!"

"That'll do, Scooter! We wants no more o' your blasphemy 'ere. Keep your strength for the work—you'll want it."

"But look 'ow she's a-wallerin'!"

"Never you mind that. You wanted 'er to go home. She's goin', an' she's goin' to keep goin'," said Green, so quietly that Scooter was temporarily silenced. "You keep the tiller, Jasper, till we've had some grub. Come on" (to Scooter); "an' you, too, Tom. Jasper can keep his own look-out now."

And out of the pale light of the new day, the flying spume and the general rush and heave of things, Skipper Green descended the companion-ladder, followed by his tremendously astonished mate. Again, little was said during the meal. The deck-hand was too much an inferior to talk there, except in answering direct questions; and as to the circumstances on deck, he was but one with the cook, *i.e.* too young in sea-life and accustomed to discipline to do more than trust their elders, think in between whiles that "she was a-makin' it fly," and be rather frightened on the

whole. The mate was pondering, but "getting no for'arder." The enormity of the situation had almost tongue-tied him. While Green, with much seriousness and some anxiety at the back of his mind, was secretly enjoying the "set-back" which he knew Scooter to be experiencing. He would dearly have liked to roar out a big guffaw at the affair; but that would have spoiled it all. However, circumstances did give him a brief vent for his pent-up feeling. Owing to the weather, and to that sharp leeward cant of everything that did not swing, the breakfast platters were on the floor, in front of the cabin fire. In reaching for the "bread barge," Scooter—who sat on an empty water-keg, placed by the weather-side of a midship stanchion—lost his balance in a big roll to leeward, and went blundering heavily against the skipper on the lee-locker. His plate of fish and ham was marooned wildly in the ash-pan, in a desperate effort to prevent the collision, and to avoid kicking his pot of coffee as he slid and tumbled to an ignominious stoppage.

"Look w'ere the devil you're comin'!" cried Green, giving Scooter a painful shove-off, and smarting, although inclined to laugh, at the impact. "Haven't you got your sea-legs yet?—or what's the matter wi' you?—slitherin' about like a pig on a switchback! W'y don't you stop ashore an' do Sund'y-school teachin'?—more in *your* line, I should think, 'an comin' to sea!"

Scooter began to vituperate some excuses for his "galoot"-like action when the skipper thundered:

"That'll do, I tell you! Keep your oaths for them as likes 'em—I don't, an' I'm skipper here!"

"Then w'y the blazes don't you act reas'nable, an' take some clout off 'er!"

"'Cause she's goin' home," Green answered, as he laughed in his heart. "I'm a-hurryin' you back to your Sund'y-school—see? Thought you wanted to be there quick. Seems to me as you're out'n your element 'ere."

"You go to hell!"

"Not till I've shown you as them as lets other men's wives alone don't mind a bit o' carryin'-on," said Green, with quiet emphasis.

"Oh, that's it! Is it?"

"Ay, an' it's good enough for any pig of a wife-meddler. See?"

This brought further mutinous splutterings from the mate, while he helped himself to more fish and ham, and began to turn the subject by saying that he would reef the packet himself during his present watch. But Green interrupted him, as quietly as emphatically, with:

"Look here, sonny, don't you touch a rope aboard 'ere for that purpose; because if you do, I shall touch you. See that? An' if I do, you won't forget it this side o' Kingdom-come."

"Well, w'y the hell don't you do the right thing an' ease 'er up a bit? She's on 'er beam-ends nearly!"

"Now, don't you take on so. Try an' steady yourself, an' don't be like a youngster on his first trip," was the gentle, ironic reply. "I'm hurryin' home with you, to your Sund'y duty; an' I'll get you there sharp as I can; but, sure as you're Scooter, if you don't——"

There was a sudden sense of something having ripped above. Almost at the same instant up went the lid of the skylight, and Jasper shouted down :

“ The foresel’s gone ! ”

With the dropping of that lid, Skipper Green was out of the cabin, pulling on a sou’wester and saying, “ Tumble up ’ere, ev’ry one of you !—smart now ! ”

On deck, he made straight for the mizzen, eased its sheets further out and hauled up the tack, so as to counteract the loss of the stay-foresail. Then he told Jasper to keep the vessel on her course. As every one knew, there was no alternative but to replace the useless sail with a sound one, and that in all haste. So into the smother about the bows they ran, where the roar and surge of the waters, combined with the rushing wind, made shouting necessary even when the speaker was only a few feet from his hearer. Still there was no danger of a sea carrying anyone overboard, providing that the helmsman did his duty. What danger there was lay in the breeze getting under an oilskin smock and filling it out like a crinoline, as it did now and then, and thus lifting (not for the first time in the annals of the North Sea fishery) the wearer over the lee-bow ; or in some important rope, stay, or a fore-spar carrying away during the work. Nothing of the sort happened, however. When all hands were aft again, and the mizzen was trimmed once more to circumstances, and Jasper and the boy had gone to their breakfasts, Skipper Green said to Scooter :

“ Keep ’er at it till twelve o’clock, an’ don’t call me till then, ’nless the wind shifts, or you see land on the

weather-bow ; but mind you lets me know if the wind shifts only a point to the nor'ard."

With that he went below, took another stolen look at his "glass," was reassured to find that it had become stationary again, and lay down, "all standing" except for his oilskins, on the lee-locker.

And Scooter stood at the tiller and swore in low, hoarse tones, as the *Firefly* heaved and ripped along to the south ; swore that he had never in all his born days seen such madman's work ; swore that the sticks would go out of her before the end of the hour ; swore that if the sticks didn't go, she would heave-down, sure as the Almighty made little apples ; swore that neither he nor any other man afloat could keep her straight under such a press of canvas—yet swore that if Tom, whom he left at the helm, while he went into the companion-way to light his pipe, didn't keep her straight *he* would get "what for" ; swore that nothing on earth or in heaven would make *him* sail again with such a hare-brained idiot of a skipper ; swore that he could carry-on with any man on the high seas, in reason, but this—"Damn it !" (he had allowed her to swing to a point or so, and a big sea had nearly flopped aboard in the waist) ; swore that if anything happened (damage done or life lost), *he* wouldn't hold *his* tongue at the other end ; swore that the situation was enough to make a saint teach the Devil how to catch souls ; swore at Tom every time he had to speak to him ; and swore that he would die swearing, because they would all go suddenly to Kingdom-come before they would have time to say amen. But behind it all there was the unnerving

knowledge that his "meddling" had been the main cause of Mrs. Green's death, and along with it a depressing feeling that Green was now sure of this and would revenge himself accordingly.

So the hours passed. The vessel's timbers creaked from stem to stern-post. The top of a sea broke aboard by the fore-rigging now and then. Tom hugged the after-mizzen-shroud, or perched himself in the companion-hutch, staring at the sun-glinted, grey smother under the lee and for'ard. Then up out of the welter, a point away the weather-bow, rose North Ronaldshay; and Scooter sent Tom to call the skipper.

When Green stood on deck and took in the bearings, just as if he was running along easily under full sail, he said, "Keep her off a point. . . . Steady!—Let her go at that till dinner."

He returned below. Scooter resumed his swearing, but not so loudly nor so clearly as before; a sort of uncertainty was coming into it, as though he was not sure just how to word the familiar oaths.

By the time dinner was over, the *Firefly* was well under the lee of the island, doing a big millrace in fairly smooth water.

"Take the tiller, Jasper," said Skipper Green. "We'll tighten-up everything ready for the next run——"

"Better take a couple o' reefs in, my Go——!"

"Stow that! Or I'll stow it for you," and the skipper looked at him threateningly, making all hands think that he was in deadly earnestness. Scooter was silent. "Get the 'handy-billy,'* Tom. All

* A small, light-running tackle for odd jobs.

hands for'ard here ! ” Then to every set of halyards they went, from jib to mizzen, till all were smartened-up. “ That'll do,” said Green. “ Now she'll whip it. Get below, Scooter—and you, Tom. You'll both be out sharp at six.”

Scooter stumped down the ladder, muttering that they would all be drowned before six o'clock. The skipper turned aft to smile ; and Jasper, at the tiller, smiled in imitation, although he would have paid highly to shorten sail.

“ She's a beauty,” Green remarked, in genuine admiration. “ She'll have us off Buchan Ness at midnight. Let her rip ! ”

So she raced and she tore, and the spume flew far and wide ahead and alee. Starting “ the game ” with a sort of satiric humour in his heart, Green was now feeling all his old-time tense joy in carrying-on, and was continuing it in sheer passion for the thing, and in equal determination to punish the “ meddler ” below—if this would make him suffer. He glowed at the heave and the movement. And she sped (and Scooter lay awake below, so full of that guilty thought, and instantly expecting the main-mast to go, that he could not smoke) out of that smoothish water and down south, till the hard nor'wester was driving big seas at her again—but not like those in the Atlantic—as she foamed and creaked across the mouth of the Moray Firth. And the great white moon got up again, and lit her way along in a scene of bewildering grandeur, hissing sprays and fine spindrift.

An inspiring riot of nature's action, and in some

of her primal colours, to Green it was a piece of sheer extravagant luxuriance in feeling ; to Scooter it was “ ditherin’.” With the breeze at about force nine, and keeping its strength at that pitch from hour to hour (as a winter nor’-wester often does in those latitudes), the vessel was making a good twelve knots per hour, and would have done almost as well under less canvas.

Scooter was again on watch, “ fairly flummoxed an’ messed up,” he said ; but he was not really so. In desperation, he still contrived to get out a foot-long oath now and then. All the same, however, there was an emphatic change in him. During the most of the watch he steered in silence ; otherwise he did the work much as usual. Yet occasionally he was so lost in thought as to get quite two points off his course. Then he would suddenly awake to circumstances, excitedly haul up or ease the tiller—according to the need of the moment—and shake in a way, till the *Firefly* was again tearing madly, straight to her goal. Once he shouted to Tom :

“ Call the —— skipper to shorten sail, or I’ll let the —— tiller go ! ”

Then, realizing his funk, by the way the youth stared at him, he lamely edged the matter off and lapsed back to silence.

At midnight Green and Jasper relieved them. Jasper took the helm from Scooter ; and as the latter passed Green, on his way to the companion-hutch, the skipper was gazing around and saying, half to himself :

“ Glorious ! By jingo, but it’s grand ! ”

Pausing in front and on the lee-side of him, Scooter

stuck up his small, pugnacious face and tip-tilted nose and spat out :

“ You’re mad !—downrite, stark, starin’, damn’ mad ! An’ if you don’t reef——”

“ Go below, you balmy idiot,” said Green, turning aft.

“ Be the livin’ Gawd, if He don’t strike me dumb, w’en——”

The skipper swung about again to pull Scooter up in his oaths ; but he, with the help of the *Firefly*, had done it for himself. At that last word, said in a big leeward roll, he had made a hurried movement to avoid Green, and in doing so his feet slipped on the wet deck, sending him spluttering wildly into the lee-scuppers. Heedless of Bill’s biting query as to “ what he did that for,” Scooter scrambled out of the water and went slipping and grasping his way for’ard. A minute later the skipper, who had watched him closely in the brilliant moonlight, ran along and dragged him from the main-throat-halyards and aft again, by the collar of his oilskin. Blaspheming and struggling, he was lifted, boy-like, into the companion-hutch and dropped to the floor below, Green saying :

“ That’ll teach you, maybe, that other men’s wives are not yourn.”

So on and on she rated, past the lights of Peterhead and Buchan Ness, standing well-up under the shelter of the land ; then lying over heavily again, as she opened out the Firth of Tay and went driving through the welter, feeling once more the press of wind and sea nigh forty miles from shore. When Scooter

returned to duty at daybreak, silent, oppressed and rather sheepish, it was to be told that the main-halyards—throat and peak—had been lashed, and that there was certain punishment for him who attempted to let them go without orders. After breakfast he also found that he was not to be left in charge of the deck ; but that the skipper would be about till noon. The truth was that Green had decided both that his mate was no longer to be trusted, and that his wisest plan was to change the vessel's course so as to get close into the land as soon as possible and there let her tear along in comparatively smooth water—he must either do this, reduce sail without delay, or see Scooter in a condition of moral pulp. But, whether so or not, Green was now determined not to shorten sail, unless the weather compelled him to—to do that, after running out of the Atlantic and across the mouth of the Moray Firth as he had done, would be equal to a sort of defeat. Given that the wind held—and during the past few hours it had been rather unsteady—he was in for the fastest passage known ; and, if his good luck continued, half a dozen Scooters should not rob him of that honour.

Hence he altered his course a couple of points to the westward, and late that afternoon he was well under the land off Berwick. Then the breeze freshened-up to force ten ; and he saw that he must haul down a reef, or something would go. So down the reef came. Scooter was so suspiciously silent, evidently wandering in thought at times, and mindful not to get into any very dangerous situation during

the work, that the skipper took care to keep him away from the halyards.

Now less pressed down into the water the *Firefly* flew south like a hunted deer, fear-stricken, but unwinded. Again the moon came up and gave distinct outlines to every object within a mile or two. After tea the skipper took the watch single-handed, and privately told Jasper to stay below and take the next watch, in the mate's place. And shore-lights got up away the weather-bow, came abeam, and disappeared off the starboard quarter. South-bound collier-brigs and schooners, under their lowest sails only, were overhauled and left astern, "hand-over-fist." Steam tramps going the same way were treated with similar indifference. And still the breeze sang its hard song of impetuous force, although fluctuating a little from time to time, a sure sign that the bulk of its strength was spent ; and Green stood at the tiller, asking only that the wind would hold for another twelve hours or so and that nothing would carry away. And midnight came again, bringing the three hands on deck—Jasper to the helm, ready and cheerful, though secretly and eagerly desirous to shorten sail ; Tom, much the same ; and the mate, apparently uncertain what to do, and even without his pipe. It was mainly this last fact that made Skipper Green eye him surreptitiously for a few minutes, then give his orders to Jasper as if the mate was not there. Heedless of it all, Scooter (who had not slept a wink during his watch below) sat on the skylight, saying nothing and seeming to have no part in what was going on.

"Mind," said the skipper, finally, "*you* keep the

tiller, Jasper ; an' if the least thing happens " (with a side-glance at the mate), " send Tom for me or shout down the skylight. I shall be on the lee-locker." He turned forwards, adding, just loud enough for Scooter at his side to hear him, " I'll let meddlers see what it is to be cowards." But the remark brought no response from Scooter.

One A.M., and the *Firefly* was off Hartlepool, belting south as a smack had never done before. Lucky, indeed, was she that nearly all her gear was practically new. And Jasper stood at the helm, till, in the faint opalescence of breaking day, Flamboro' Head light flashed out, twice white and once red ; then he sent Tom down with the news. Up came the skipper, changed the course a point and a half west, and was about to return to his locker, when Scooter crawled off the skylight, saying humbly that he felt cold and would " like a bit of a warm." He was either shivering or trembling.

" Might as well come down to the fire, then," remarked Green, as he disappeared, feeling a mixture of contempt and pity stirring in him.

Scooter took two awkward strides for the companion-way, then incontinently dropped on to his hands and knees, made the passage in that manner, and went out of sight down the ladder, as Jasper and Tom laughed in derision.

Breakfast came. Scooter wanted none. He looked at everything, saw nothing, and said he felt " queer."

" Better turn in, then, for an hour or two," the skipper answered, in some scorn at what he clearly saw to be " blue funk."

So Scooter crawled into his bunk as he stood, in oilskins and sea-boots, and shaking visibly. Green could have laughed outright ; but he ate his breakfast quietly, then he relieved the two hands on deck, ordering them to "hurry up an' get some sleep"—he would want all hands out by ten o'clock or before.

And away sped the craft on her last forty miles' run, Green feeling all the elation of a conqueror, except now and then, when the wind fell away to no more than a smart breeze. As a matter of fact, half the wind was gone before the *Firefly* reached Spurn Point. It was nearly twelve o'clock when the skipper had occasion to call his crew on deck ; and it was not then to shorten sail, in order to beat up the river, but to shake the reef out. Jasper, Tom, and the boy came up sharply enough.

"Where's the mate?" Green asked, giving the tiller to the deck-hand.

"Sittin' on the locker, cryin', I believe," Jasper answered.

"Doin' what!" came gruffly from the skipper ; with which he raised the lid of the skylight and called : "Now, Scooter, tumble up 'ere!" As the lid went down, orders were given to Jasper and the boy to cast the reef loose.

Minutes went by. The lighter part of the work was done. All was ready for hoisting the great sail. Green descended to the cabin, to see why Scooter was stopping there.

"Aren't you comin' on deck?" he inquired, entering the cabin.

But all he got was what he afterwards described as "ditherin' nonsense." For a little while he looked steadily at the mate, who was raving in a way, that they were "all sailin' straight to hell and would be moored there in no time ; the devil was on the dock-head waiting to pass 'em in, an' the wind was freshening into a hurrican'."

Green crossed the cabin floor, put one big hand on Scooter's shoulder, pushing him backwards, so that he had to look up, and said, in grim, quiet force, "Did you meddle with my wife last summer?" The mate drooped his gaze, let his head come forward all he could, and began to rave again. Green shook him, with that one powerful hand, saying, "Answer, you rag—did you meddle with my wife?"

Again Scooter looked up. In place of the panic of funk that had held him, his face was now full of a pitiable sort of imbecility. His expression and bearing were life's inevitable ludicrousness thrust into the centre of tragedy. Meanwhile, the others on deck waited and wondered. With another shake, Green repeated his query.

"Y—e—e—s," mumbled Scooter ; "but I—I didn't——"

The skipper hurled him in scorn to the floor and left him there ; then he returned to the deck and superintended the making of sail.

As the *Firefly* passed through the lock-gates, Scooter climbed quietly ashore and made homewards, with all the appearance of a man whose mind was in a state of comatose. As he went—rather by instinct, apparently, than by intention—by the dockside men

watched him curiously ; for they, in answer to questions as to where the mate was, had heard something of his malady. And that was the beginning of a tale that was often told both ashore and afloat in the Grimsby fishery.

CHAPTER III

Last of Scooter : A supernatural occurrence : Bound north : A would-be deserter : Strange behaviour : Oh, for England ! : Dirty weather : Christmas-Eve : A fearful visitor : Danger : Hard questions : " There it is again ! " : An awful fall : What could it be ? : A murderer : Great suspense : Chilled with wind and fear : Explanations : A typical " tramp " : Smelling to heaven : Wrestling with a sea : " Tramps " as they were :
Back to England.

*And who shall say the butchered dead
May send no wraith to haunt the scenes,
Where passion sought the blood it shed,
While smiling Hell provided means ?*

IN those years—the later 'seventies and early 'eighties—the deep-sea fishery, as it was known on the Humber, was as full of stirring tales (some of which are worked into " Fishers of the Sea ") as an artful girl is full of wiles. But for some time after it happened there were none that quite came up to the story of how Scooter Jackson lost his nerve during the greatest run ever made by a Grimsby smack, when those " lifeboats of the North Sea " were at their best. From that voyage onwards he became a quiet " lumper " on the Pontoon (fish market), and was never again known to ask for a berth on any craft. Of course, he was often joked mercilessly on the affair, but he rarely made any answer, however biting the queries were, nor did he ever resent them in any way,

so far as I heard. Finally, he became a pleasure boatman at Cleethorpes, full of never-ending scriptural quotations, and going barefooted on the sharp sand, shingles, &c., almost the year round, "so as the pains o' the flesh might mortify the wickedness o' the soul."

Truth to tell, this book could be filled with the record of things that came within my knowledge during the years I spent in the fishery—things that would make the average landsman gasp, and the stay-at-home ask if such could be. But I have more seas to cover than are open to the East Coast fishery.

On page 214 of "My Vagabondage" there is a brief mention of a "supernatural occurrence" that happened on board a small craft in which my old friend Shells and I voyaged together. In particular it concerned a middle-aged Swedish A.B., named Hilmar Petersen; and it is not for me to say that I saw the first appearance of the apparition, thing, delusion, or whatever it was. But that some of my shipmates either saw it, or unshakably believed they did, there could be no manner of doubt. Nor do I, so long after the affair, undertake to explain it away; though it might have been due to a disorganized imagination added to a guilty conscience on Hilmar's part, but that could not possibly have been the case with the remainder of us. Sceptics, to whom I have told the story at times, have put the strange happening down to the coincidence of some natural phenomenon occasioned by the weather, and working in unholy keeping with a murderer's thoughts and our proximity to the scene of his crime.

As the thing occurred I tell it, together with the main features leading up to it; leaving the reader to

find, if he can, a material solution to that which seemed to us, rough and thought-confined seamen that we were, to be all too supernatural. What I did not see I tell as it was told to me at the time.

Our craft was a three-masted, north-country schooner, the *Martha Webster*. We had gone from her port of registration, with coals, to Riga, expecting to load there with grain or deals, if not with both ; for the Baltic ports were open to a considerably late date that winter. But we were not destined to do either. Instead of that we received orders, on the last day of discharging, to get down to Kalmar at once for a holdful of pit-props. When the last of the coals went over the side (whilst Skipper Brown was ashore, getting his clearance papers), we were hard at work in preparing the schooner for sea, ballast coming in at the same time—so great was the “old man’s” hurry to be away, lest the ice should creep on us in the night and make sailing a day of uncertainty. Shells—usually so cheerful in a quiet way—was certainly pessimistic about the passage home.

During this time Hilmar made an effort to desert, in a shore-boat that had brought us some vegetables. The mate caught him slipping away, got a grip on the boat and dragged Hilmar back aboard ; for the mate was a big, raw-boned and rather “hard-cased” Aberdonian. We could ill-spare a hand of Hilmar’s seamanship and stolid strength, especially in the Baltic at that time of the year. In this all hands concurred. So a strict watch was kept on the Swede’s movements, till after the schooner was heading away for her loading port.

As to the reason of this attempt to "jump" the schooner, seen afterwards as another proof of Hilmar's guilt, it might have been any one of four or five causes that are always more or less on the point with seamen at all times, and every one of them a world's width from what was doubtless the real cause. Shells would have it that Hilmar merely wanted to have the winter at home, without paying his fare back from England to Stockholm.

The only thing of note during that passage was Hilmar's uncommon moodiness, until Kalmar harbour lay a few hours stretch away our lee-bow. Yet his habitual silence and taciturnity had so dwindled our interest in him—although the time had been when they aroused a considerable amount of speculation on our part—that we barely noticed an increase in these outstanding traits. Now, however, he forced our renewed attention by wildly leaping from his bunk, on to the boy who was calling him and the remainder of the watch, and rushing over to the opposite bulk-head, against which he actually cowered—as a sailor brave and hardy to a fault though he was—crying in Swedish, as near as a Norwegian shipmate could translate it: "Oh, no, no, Olafsen! You are dead, go back!"

What a lesson in abject misery, despair and half-wakefulness he was, crouching there in the dim light of that cheap, evil-smelling oil-lamp, and surrounded by the bunks, men's chests, and all the *etcetera* of a small, dirty, "wind-jammer's" fo'c'sle! The boy looked at him in fright; the others did so in surprise. One of his two watchmates asked him what was the

matter. The voice, added to the English, helped him back to a glimmering sense of his whereabouts and position. In any case, he arose, glanced stupidly around, seemed to pull himself together; then he returned to the side of his bunk and began to dress, half apologetically muttering something anent a bad dream. At that time his action was put down to a dream. And luckily we did not then have any hands who were particularly superstitious in the matter of dreams.

Whilst we were shipping the props, a nor'-wester began to blow, and frost might come down and imprison us any night. For that reason our cargo-workers were paid an extra seventy öre per day to get the loading done quickly.

During the four days we spent in that Swedish port, Hilmar never crossed the schooner's rail. When the harbour was left astern, his relief was somewhat noticeable, even to us in the hurry and bustle of putting to sea again. After his death we looked back and saw how his moodiness had increased as we neared Kalmar; how completely he had avoided the shore whilst we lay there, and how he grew less silent and morose as the schooner put knots between us and that place. But in "windbags," moody A.B.s of uncertain age are far too common to cause interest, unless a particular case happens to have some special attractions. Besides, we then had too much to do about the decks and aloft to give ordinary heed to that "queer 'un" who formed one of our crew.

A fine breeze was blowing from about three points abaft our starboard beam, making the *Martha*

Webster give a good account of herself. The load was consigned to Lynn ; so that with fair fortune through the Cattegat and across the North Sea, we still had a chance to see the New Year in amid English scenes.

In the meantime, our enemy, frost, increased. The wind came off that Swedish shore with a grip like pliable ice. The washing-up of seas on our weather-side made icicles hang from the rail. These slowly grew in length and thickness until, as that second day wore on to night, they touched the deck and were the girth of a man's arm. Ropes were stiff with frozen spray ; the decks sloshy and unsure under a coating of half-formed ice, that would have become hard but for our continual treading in it, and the occasional heavy swish of waters over the decks. Of the sun we had not seen a glimpse since the previous day. As night gathered thick about us, snow came down ; this was followed by a fine, sleety mist that made things appear to be of a dull, dark grey, and gave undue shapes to material forms.

These matters show in what atmospheric conditions we were when that apparition visited us, or when the delusion came that made us think we saw a supernatural figure.

On Christmas-Eve our fore-yards were braced up, sheets flattened to the wind, and the schooner stood up to beat her way around Cape Falsterbo into the Sound. At the end of the first dog-watch we tacked to make a board in under the Cape. When one-bell was rung at a quarter to eight, grog was served out—Schiedam—for the double purpose of commemorating

the hour, and to help each man into a proper mental and physical condition for that arduous night's work of beating up the Sound. At eight-bells the schooner again stood across for the Danish coast. Unknown to us at the time, the end of that stretch over was to be such a one as none of us had ever before experienced.

Now the starboard watch went into the fo'c'sle to lie down, ready dressed for work ; and the cutting wind whipped the remainder of us into fierce activity to keep our blood in circulation. Shells declared that he had been caught napping this time ; but he would never again risk the Baltic so late in the year. After narrowly weathering the southern arm of Kiøge Bay, we fetched well into the Bay itself. Then all hands stood-by to put the vessel about again. It was Hilmar's spell at the wheel, almost the best helmsman amongst us.

From the skipper came the loud order, " Down helm ! "

Round spun the wheel to starboard—in that peculiar, thick, greyish, moist atmosphere.

" Cheery, lads, cheery ! " was the " old man's " encouraging call to those at the braces and the sheets.

In that instant Hilmar sent forth a fearful yell of horror. We heard it forward, and there was no mistaking the note of his cry. Away from the wheel he leapt, as if out of a material hell. Back the released wheel tore to port. The schooner paused, head-on to wind and sea, her fore-and-aft canvas flapping fiercely, her square sails dangerously full of

the fresh breeze that was blowing. About swung the skipper to see what was the matter aft.

“Merciful God, what’s that ! ” he cried.

It was a time to say, “angels and ministers of grace defend us.” There, at what had been the lee-side of the now erratically spinning wheel, was a greyish-white humanlike form that made but a misty kind of a barrier to one’s seeing the solid things beyond. In the slush on the deck by the skylight grovelled Hilmar, back upwards, his head forward, face huddled up in his arms. Owing to the weight of her helm being suddenly taken off her, the vessel hung in the wind ; and we forward could not understand why she did so. Close astern lay the Danish coast—so close that but little drifting would put us in a dangerous position. As it was, we could not afford to lose a single minute. The mate yelled out a query as to what had gone wrong aft. No answer came. He sent Shells—who chanced to be handiest—to ascertain what had happened. The hurried, heavy slosh, slosh of Shells’ feet along the deck, added to a returning sense of our danger, apparently aroused the skipper from his fit of fear and amazement. He drew his hands across his eyes, again glanced aft, and saw nothing that had no business there.

“What’s wrong, sir ? ” cried Shells from near the mizzen-mast.

“Nothing ! ” was the answer, given on the spur of the moment. “Go for’ard and get the head-sails trimmed ! Quick, now ! ” And Shells came back to us.

Within that moment Skipper Brown was jamming

the wheel hard-a-starboard and gruffly calling Hilmar to his post. The latter raised his head, only to throw a shuddering look aft, then to bury his face again. The skipper stood where that *something* had been. Hilmar lifted his head a second time, saw this fact, and took courage to approach the wheel ; from which, however, he immediately slunk back, muttering incoherently.

“ Come here, you blessed idiot ! ” was the low, fierce command he received. “ Come here ! ” He went. “ And don’t you breathe a word of this to any man aboard, or I’ll tell ’em it’s some devil’s work of yours. Do you hear ? ”

Yes, he heard, and replied in a half-whisper that he did. He took the wheel from the skipper, his actions still marked by abject fear. For the time being, at least, the skipper fully believed that he and Hilmar had just experienced some hallucination, a kind of meteorological phenomenon occasioned by the state of the weather. He was young in years, and not full of the superstitions of old-fashioned sailors. But his knowledge of the average seaman was enough to make him aware that if we others heard of the affair, we, or most of us, would probably and speedily become limp as frayed-out rope yarns. And there was before us some hours of work that needed the strong hands and alert minds of able men.

As good luck had it, our craft filled on the port tack. Again the yards were braced up, the sheets hauled aft, and away she flew for the Swedish side of the Sound, heading well-up withal.

When the braces and other ropes and lines were once more coiled down and turned over ready for the next tack, we—the helmsman and the look-out man excepted—were free to idle about and talk until again wanted at the ropes. Then it was that some questions were asked, and answered with suppositions wide of the real mark, till there came along the quietening lie that the wheel had slipped from Hilmar's hands and knocked him aside—not an altogether unusual happening to a bad steersman, even in such weather as we were then having ; but it could not be said that this was likely to have been the case there, hence that diplomatic lie had no more than a partial effect. We could not forget the character of Hilmar's yell.

The delusion (if such it was), however, had so shaken the Swede that, despite his usual excellence as a steersman, he had to be removed from the wheel. I took his place, being usually accounted good at a helm, as most deep-sea fishermen are. Hilmar could no longer steer straight, either by the compass or by the luff of the top-sails. This news passed forward and caused murmurs in and about the fore-castle. More unanswerable queries followed. And what could have answered them, except *that* from which all hands would have run as from nothing else on earth, *that* and the big Swede from whom not a legion of devils could then have drawn his secret ?

Our next move was a shortening of sail, made absolutely necessary by a freshening of the wind. Skipper Brown determined to get this done before we entered the narrower straits. For this work all hands were mustered ; and, under the mate's personal

guidance, the fore-sail was clewed and bunted-up. Then the mate took the look-out, the "old man" the wheel, and all else ran aloft to the task of making the sail fast to its yard.

In the hurry and turmoil of this work Hilmar had evidently forgotten that unnerving affair at the wheel. At any rate, he was first on the ratlins, and away he went in something akin to his old manner direct to the vantage-post—in point of hard pulling—allowed by that fact, the weather-yard-arm. After him we others sprang, in a way glad of the exercise in those bitter atmospheric conditions, and ranged ourselves out along the spar as we arrived on the foot-rope.

With the usual "Aye, aye, aye, boys!" the sail was gathered up. Then those who were in the bunt, by the mast, gave their signal—"Yo-ho-ho, up she comes!"—for rolling it snugly on the yard. Hardly had the phrase been spoken, when from aft there came the involuntary cry:

"There it is again!"

Barely any other shout would have better drawn every man's attention from what he was doing. Over the whistling breeze it reached us, all too well. Each man turned his head to look aft, some turning to windward, others around the opposite way. And the former instantly gave vent to partially smothered cries of fear. It was a mercy that all who saw the awesome shape did not there and then release their grasp and drop from the yard.

Hilmar instinctively turned to his left (windward, as the man on his right had done) and saw, there on the yard-arm by the lift, that same horrifying *thing*

which had stood as a lee-helmsman for him not an hour previously.

Without a moment's pause he gave a scream—no other word would describe his utterance—that had in it something much worse than ordinary fear. With the cry, up went his hands, and he fell backwards, in-board to the deck. As he dropped, the apparition—weather-phenomenon, or whatever it was—went up, past the top-sails—up, up, up, into the fine-snow-charged darkness overhead, where it vanished.

Amongst us there were those who afterwards swore, when the whole tale was known, that they saw a satisfied smile on its dim, greyish features, as the thing went upwards. But imagination is too rife at such times; and we know what the average man is to back up his idea with ready-made evidence.

The ensuing numbing spell was broken quickly by a shout given in a different note of fear. This came from the mate, and was in part an order to “tumble down and tack ship.” Down we scrambled, like half-mad monkeys, to the deck. And urgent need there was for the quickest of actions. Close under our lee-bow lay the Swedish coast—so close, in fact, that the schooner, smart as she was on her helm, had barely room enough to gather sufficient way for tacking. However, luck was with us in the matter. Up in the wind she came again, and swung about without pausing in stays. But, as she turned on her heel, that unsecured fore-sail was riven to pieces by the still freshening breeze.

Self-preservation and the safety of the vessel had prevented our looking for Hilmar till the craft was

well on the opposite tack. We had heard him strike, with a thickening thud, on the decks ; and a search resulted in his being found, moaning deliriously, by the foot of the fore-mast. With care he was carried into the fo'c'sle, giving weak cries as he was moved.

There, under the dim light of that apology for a lamp, the skipper tried to ascertain the extent of his injuries. From the very outset of this examination it was all too evident that he was far beyond our limited means of help, and in his rambling mutterings he made it as plain that he had taken some fellow creature's life—that for the love of a woman he had become a murderer. But how or where or when, his disjointed accusations and unmeant confession did not say. It was more than enough for us, rough seamen though we were, that we knew the bare fact—for was it not to us proof undisputable that the dead had come back to avenge itself ?

Now drawn inside by a subtle magnetism to listen to his muttered ravings, he slowly dying all the time ; then out on deck tacking the vessel in that pitchy darkness and the whipping wind (for the snow and that peculiar mist had passed away) ; whispering in ever-renewing fear of what had been and was taking place ; almost afraid of ourselves generally, of the thick gloom around us, of our voices, and of being alone ; not that death merely had any uncommon terrors for us. It was the avenging presence of that mysterious visitant which had so unmanned us ; and for its reappearance we were continually and painfully on the alert. For did not our older shipmates

solemnly assert that it would come again when Hilmar died, that it was sure to make a third appearance just as he passed away. Circumscribed in our lives, our thoughts, our position, and in all that appertained to us ; face-to-face with that enshrouding blackness out of which could come such strange and unnerving things ; unsure of our very lives, into which could leap so easily such chilling touches of a life or state that lay beyond the veil of our raw materialism, although we were apparently not a hand's-breadth from the occult that defied our understanding ; alone on the lashing waters, that in themselves could be so terrible, and had at such a time an atmosphere and environment that were so vastly dissimilar to those of *terra firma*, and almost omnipotent to boot.

Meanwhile, we moved about as if a change of position was the one thing in life to be avoided ; yet chilled to the bone mostly, well-nigh without our knowing it at times ; doing the vessel's work incidentally, as a matter of instinct rather than as an outcome of training and reason ; and all the while wishing for daylight, as probably none of us had ever wished for anything before—so dragged away those awful hours of night ; awful to us solely because of a secret murder, darkness, our atmospheric conditions, and the sensation of there being about us something so strange as to force from us a dread equal to the ignorance from which it sprang.

Over by Amager we tacked the schooner again. Ten minutes later Hilmar's soul had crossed its harbour-bar, outward-bound on a voyage made up of only one passage and a port of destination.

Curiously, when his death became known to us we felt strangely relieved, even to the boy who kept the skipper's berth clean, and learnt sailorizing and cooking in his spare time. Not that we had passed sentence on the murderer, or even judged him. His crime was his own, not ours, and by it he must stand to the Judge of all. Hand-to-mouth seamen, with a philosophy that was as crude yet as serviceable as were our own methods of life, we should have resented any responsibility as our shipmate's keepers. In his own life each one had troubles enough, and some to spare. In fact, such things in "wind-jammers" were much the same then as they are now.

As to that misty attendant on the Swede—ah, there was a matter of another kind; and, through Hilmar, in a sense, it was from its direction that our relief came. With Hilmar dead, we felt that we were rid of it also. This may seem to have been the height of callousness, ignorance, or what-not. Believe me, it was merely what we felt. Nor were we, collectively, either in superstition or in any other human attribute, below the general plane of the sailors of that day.

The bald fact is that Hilmar's death had the immediate effect of causing a partial yet clearly perceptible return of our normal feelings in such weather and in our nautical conditions at the time. In this new phase of matters—for even the modernity of the skipper and a sceptical Tyne-sider had gone under at Hilmar's confession, coupled with the second appearance of the apparition—the first thing that we noted was the real weight of the still slowly increasing breeze, which was then too strong and dead ahead

for us to try the Straits of Elsinore. For this reason Copenhagen harbour was made with all possible speed.

There the dead Swede was buried. There, also, we quickly learnt from the British Consul (himself a Swede), who took possession of the murderer's chest and its contents, that on a Christmas-Eve, fifteen years previously, our late shipmate had killed a man in a fit of unjust jealousy, near a village between Kalmar and Carlskröna. The whole story was there, we were told ; written in fairly good Swedish, and detailed in a vividly-realistic manner, with a suspicion of remorse here and there between the lines, yet on the whole written as if remorse were useless rather than unneeded. Carefully tied and sealed up, it had lain, most likely for years, in a little locker in his chest.

January was well in when the *Martha Webster* landed us once more in England ; and it was then—having a little to spare of a Baltic winter—that Shells and I shipped east, he, alas, never again to come north of Marseilles. After my return from that unhappy affair—having put in the gunnery practice which the R.N.R. required of me as a member, and failed in a bitterness-made effort to enlist into the Canadian North-West Mounted Police—I joined another steam “tramp” (in the Royal Dock, Grimsby, late in 1883), the *White Rose* of South Shields, and, I think, about the worst *Rose* that ever went to sea. I give this record of her as an instance of what life was then like in a third-rate cargo steamer. On that occasion I

had no former shipmates to help to smother down the strangeness of the first twenty-four hours in unaccustomed company. But "birds of a feather flock together"—provided that they are not after the same worm, to follow up the simile—and we were soon a fairly easy-working half-dozen, one with the other, on our side of the fo'c'sle.

But to return to the packet, and not to make this recital a doleful one. She was one of a fleet of ocean scallywags that regularly adventured their dithering plates into the Mediterranean when the Baltic froze them out. I have mentioned her name—Chunk of Coal would have suited her better. Her one virtue—so far as we seamen were concerned—was a straight-up-and-down chief-mate, and a second one who was barely second in that respect. Besides, it seemed to be in the log-book of her rough destiny to have foul weather whenever she crossed "the Bay." On the third day out "salt-horse" was served to all hands forward. (In nearly all "tramps," in those days, only the cabin and the engineers' tables got fresh provender after the second day out.) This, up to that morning, had led us—notwithstanding certain dietary evidence to the contrary—to expect what we were not to get.

Its offence was rank—I mean the beef's. It smelt to heaven—to the dirty-white heaven of our black hole of a fo'c'sle, at any-rate. It smelt my two watch-mates out on deck, and I followed loyally; for, having no olfactory nerve, I was not affected. They cursed it, its purveyors, the "old man" and the owners to the far antithesis of Heaven. But the

whole of this was only incidental. The real trouble was : Who should bell the cat by fetching out the offending joint, also the almost equally insulting soup into which the beef had been dipped for the sake of flavouring the thin liquid, and present them to the "old man?" This duty was shouldered by elderly Bob Gudge, a thick-set, plain-spoken, thoroughly efficient and generally quiet seaman, who had originally hailed from Hull ; but for many years he had made his home wherever his pillow was. He and I went into the fo'c'sle for the offenders. Just then two pallid devils of the vessel's hot hades appeared from their fo'c'sle, loaded with what they were then supposed to be eating. Let me state it simply : *They* were "goin' aft"—*they* were, and their language did more than smell to heaven.

The *Rose*, as we called her, because of our inherent love of brevity, was then wallowing her way through "the Bay" with a fine nor'-wester on her starboard beam. And she could wallow. She had the proud reputation of having rolled her fore-yardarms, port and starboard, dip-and-dip, into the Bay of Lyons—where Nelson lost the *Vanguard's* foremast and main and mizzen top-masts, when on his way to the Battle of the Nile. She was a nice "roll-along, blow-along" old girl, was the *Rose*. She did not believe in doing things by halves. She was a Britisher from her keel to her main truck. She dipped deep and regularly. But so long as I knew her she always rose again after each dip.

At any rate, Bob Gudge and I came forth with the beef and soup, holding them well away from his line

of scent. The firemen had paused to swear, between the break of the fo'c'sle and the fore-hatch. Bob had an unwelcome job in hand ; so he went ahead to get it done, his two watchmates at his heels. We got a four-fathom start of the pale devils. The *Rose* rolled heavily from the wind ; then swung straight back as far, and more determinedly. This was just in front of a white-topped green wall, a good twelve feet high. She felt her danger, as a ship always does at such times and tried to roll and run away. Her seven and a half knots and tubby bottom were not equal to such an effort ; experience might have told her so. Half that green wall fell sheer over the rail, on and about those weather-side mutineers against rotten meat. It took them in its arms, them and the beef and the soup, like a strong, young, demonstrative mother takes the chubby cooer from whom she has been absent all the day. We two on the lee-deck got a pretty equal share, and all of us were fresh from our bunks, while the breeze and the roller had come post-haste from the Arctic. It was not a fair catch-as-catch-can.

Men, beef from which they would jump almost as if it were a shark, soup, tin, platters, wild salt water, and wilder curses, made a fine pandemonium. A real "hardcase" Nova Scotia mate would have danced in uncontrollable delight at that hurly-burly of things, men, and words.

Yet the beef—it was like Lady Macbeth's hands. Not all the salt waters of earth, nor the sweet waters of heaven, could take away its stain.

By-and-bye, after much blasphemy, grabbing, and

gasping, Bob, I, and the two pale devils appeared before the "old man" on the bridge, where he and the mate stood with their sextants ready for "taking the sun," and from which post of vantage they had watched the watery scramble below. The tale was told; but all to no purpose. The "old man" smelt the meat, and swore that *he* could detect nothing wrong. No, because—unknown to us then—he had never known what it was to have a sense of smell. In the face of such calm, simple, incontrovertible testimony to the opposite we could do no more than retire, wondering momentarily whether we were awake or asleep.

But the "old man's" victory was only short-lived, as it should be. Before "the Rock" was reached the chief-engineer had entered the lists on behalf of his men—not an uncommon action by a chief at such times, although a mate was never known to do the same for sailors. If such a thing did happen, Davy Jones would straightway surrender his dead. To give the dry and sickening details briefly, the pork and the butter were as bad as the beef; and the "old man" was to blame. The owners allowed him the usual eighteenpence per man per diem, out of which he regularly fed his forward hands from the scrap-heap of provisions thrown ashore by deep-water "wind-jammers." He was a canny Geordy, taking care of the pounds, and knowing that the banker's account thereof would take care of itself. Yet he was far from being the only nautical Shylock in that respect. In those years there were hundreds of them, masters and owners; apparently there is some improvement now.

I have known masters of steam "tramps," running on "time charters," between Black Sea and Mediterranean ports, give their crews fowls, geese, and the like—because the birds were cheaper up there than meat was—till the men flatly refused to do another handstir unless they got their "beef an' pork, accordin' to the ship's articles." But it must also be said that the refusal to accept "another thing of skin an' bone an' feathers" was often due to the fact that if the fowl was boiled it was boiled to rags or leather, and if it was baked (as oven-cooked food is termed aboard) it entered the fo'c'sle in a half-cooked or a burnt condition. As to the enormous importance of reform in cooking aboard ship, have we not, within the past few years, seen schools started for the purpose of teaching ships' "cooks" to cook? As the old saying graphically expressed it, there were thousands of men in that capacity who "could not boil salt water properly."

Naturally, in "wind-jammers," especially deep-water ones, that make passages of sixty to one hundred and twenty days' duration, the provisions must be of a worse kind than in steam "tramps" that are seldom more than a month at sea. True, one does not hear much nowadays of tobacco-boxes and the like being made from pieces of lean "salt horse." Yet aboard such ships biscuits full of weevils were as common as the dog-watch, while evil-smelling beef and pork were a pretty regular occurrence towards the end of a long voyage. Seeing that few landsmen know it, I may state here that ships' provisions are supplied on a Board of Trade scale, which consists of

beef and pork, bread (biscuits), tea and coffee, butter or potatoes, sugar, three quarts of water per day for all purposes, and half a pound of flour every other day ; all these things are regulated by weight, just enough to keep a man in working condition. Most owners, however, are good enough to add marmalade, pepper, and salt as extras—because no man eats his full “ whack ” of biscuits. The evil of the scale need not be dwelt on.

With regard to the sleeping quarters, what could be said for a bare, iron place, icy in winter and “ sweating ” in summer ; where paints and oils were housed ; through which dirty chains and ropes were dragged daily when in harbour ; where the platters had to rest on the floor for lack of a table, and where water came through the ports in every heavy head-sea ? This was the usual steam “ tramp’s ” fo’c’sle ; and, in other ways, the small “ wind-jammer’s ” was no better. Again, in the woodwork of many a “ tramp’s ” fo’c’sle, vermin (“ black jumpers ” and “ red crawlers ”) were so securely fixed that neither tar, caustic soda, paraffin, nor carbolic acid solution would clear them out. Sulphur-“ smoking,” that killed rats by the score, had little more effect on them than fresh air. As for the rats themselves, in many a ship, unless there was some kind of grain or seed aboard, they would sit on the fo’c’sle-floor and eat whatever was thrown to them. In the *Volante*, “ tramp,” in which I spent six months in the Mediterranean, the rats were so numerous that a man knocked four off his bunk-edge with the sweep of his arm. At the moment those four and some others

were apparently making a procession over decks from the fore-peak—at the head and below the fo’c’sle—to the fore-hold, because they could not get through the iron bulkhead.

Rats are fond of woollen and worsted materials, and where neither tallow nor grain is to be had they will feed on such things. In the *Diamond*, a steam tramp in which I made a Western ocean trip, and where food for them was scarce, they nightly made for socks, stockings, mittens, or anything else of the kind left about. When the loose articles of this nature were put away, the rats actually nibbled the socks on our feet, as we slept. Missiles had to be thrown at them to drive them away. In fact, when the vessel came into cold latitudes, all hands had to resort to such preventive expedients, to keep the rats away, that the story of them would read like an extravaganza.

But to return briefly to the *Rose*. The master was compelled to put into Gibraltar and provide us with food that could be eaten. Happily for us she did not go far on that voyage, only to Genoa with the coal, then across to Tripoli for esparto grass, and home again.



CHAPTER IV

Away east again : A pilgrim ship : Vari-coloured humanity :
Moslem traits : " Deck " passengers : A lover and his lass : The
romance of an *adajar* : An unlover-like trick : Stamboul :
Howlers below : Deafening worship : A birth at sea : " Clew
up the topsail ! " : Darkness, wind and pilgrims : A set
back : A turbaned degenerate : An *affaire de cœur* : " More
wise than two serpents " : A boat chase : A woman's ruse.

SHIPPING was in a poor condition that winter ; large numbers of vessels were laid up, and as nothing better than the *White Rose* was to be had, without much waiting, I returned to Grimsby and went back to the fishery—which, despite its hardships and monotony, had better food, accommodation and pay to offer in lieu of the foreign harbours and the general variety of merchant-service life. I spent the following summer up the Baltic, during which the brothers Johansen—Olaf and Ivor—and I played the fool's game of taking anarchist leaflets to St. Petersburg. At the beginning of the winter we shipped away east again, this time on a voyage that promised, and kept its promise, to give me something after my own heart—the colour, the glamour, the romance, and all the *etcetera* of the Orient ; for we were to carry pilgrims from the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean to Yenbo and Sherm Rabegh. I was full of elation at my good luck, and laid in my usual stock of second-hand books—all about the wondrous East, of course.

Ivor and Olaf took it all in their general northern way. Our craft, which we joined in Hartlepool, was named after the Dog Star; but it does not follow that she was one of the Star liners. She hailed from what the Geordy seaman calls "Canny Shiel's ower the bar." And one fine morning we put her head to the s'uth'ard, before a steady nor'easter, passed safely through the channel, and left the white cliffs of "merrie, merrie England" away astern—every man-Jack of us, except the mate (who had previously done such venturesome business), bound on a quest that, in certain ways, was as full of possibilities as ever a barrel was full of tar or a "tramp's" stoker full of sheer devilment.

Our passage across the bay was a fine one. By this time the wind had shifted to the nor'-west—or we had run out of one breeze into another—and it whistled over the vessel's starboard quarter in a half-gale, good enough to belly-out the foresail and fore-topsail, until the greater part of another knot was added to our nine. But, despite the *Sirius's* evident intention to hurry down into southern waters (and on that occasion she seemed to be "putting side on" and thinking herself one of the "grey-hounds," instead of the loitering mongrel that she was), by the time we were running gaily along the African coast, in "Queen's weather," we had made everything ready for our first consignment of the followers of the Prophet—followers whom we all more or less knew in appearance when on their mother-earth, but of whose ways as pilgrims on a British ship we were wholly ignorant.

This making ready consisted of thoroughly cleaning out the "tween-decks" and as carefully white-washing every nook and cranny between them; boarding-over the lower hatchways securely, by the carpenter and his temporary helps, lest any of the faithful should go inadvertently seeking for Paradise and the hourii in the darkness and dirt of the lower hold. "Chips" had also built rough companion-ways to the after-parts of hatch-coamings immediately before the bridge and abaft the engine-room. In addition to these, four cooking-stoves, two forward and two aft, on the upper deck, had been firmly fastened by iron-plates to the bulwarks and deck, and hooded over with unplanned boards. Thus the pilgrims were provided with "galleys"; for neither might they eat food cooked by a Christian, nor would the Christian captain allow them inside the ship's galley—not if he knew of it—and thereby hangs many a tale of francs, piastres and rupees made surreptitiously. But as those tales would be out of place here, I hasten to say that the morning on which we steamed into Algiers was one of the fairest that Nature ever produced, even in that land of perpetual summer and ophthalmia-afflicted beggars.

Our charter said that each batch was to board us on the day of our arrival, or a certain sum must be paid for every subsequent hour's delay. Hence, three hours later, Moors and Arabs, with here and there a face of such intensified colour that it spoke darkly of Africa's more burning sands far away, streamed up the accommodation-ladder until the upper deck was a mass of flowing robes, faces bronzed

to all hues, fez and turban-covered heads and white impenetrable veils which reached to the knees of their wearers. There were old men and young men, maidens, wives and widows—to judge by the brightness of eyes, stature and build, so far as a Giaour could tell through a female Asiatic's shapeless drapery.

No sooner was the last of this party over the rail, and our ship's doctor (a young fellow who had just obtained his diploma, and was voyaging with us for the sake of experience) had given his word that there were no fever or cholera cases amongst them, than the ladder was hoisted up and flattened to the vessel's side. Our patent anchor (which the mate, an elderly man and new to "these fangled things," swore would refuse duty some time or other when most needed) was hove into the hawse-pipe, and the *Sirius* throbbed out of the harbour, heading again to the eastward. Now it was that we had time to notice these items of our cargo—and what a parti-hued crowd of humanity they were! At a casual glance the two predominating elements were picturesqueness and apparent poverty—apparent, because many of their rags were assumed to hide, or take the place of, more costly garments. This is generally done by a very large section of the forty thousand pilgrims who yearly journey to Mecca and Medina: first, because the Mussulman dreads to tempt the cupidity of European sailors (probably owing to the treatment which he at one time received at the hands of our merchant-seamen); and, second, because he knows that the more wealthy his appearance at the birth or burial place of the author of the Koran, the greater will the

priests there expect his presents to be to them. Now, your average Moslem is a past master in the art of deception—at least that portion of his persuasion are who have anything to do with supposed Christians who go down to the sea in ships. And this, again, is possibly owing to the lordly actions of other so-called Christians ; but whether so or not, the true believer practises this characteristic of his with a devoutness worthy of all honesty. One of the strongest and most hard-worked articles of his unwritten faith is that the more he robs and generally deceives the “ Christian dog,” the larger will be his share of Paradise. And it matters not whether his skin be that of the noble, yet ignoble, one on whom Iago played his devilish tricks, or black, or yellow, this article remains the same with him. Perhaps when white seamen have learnt to treat him honestly and fairly, if ever, he will do likewise in return.

But I am leaving our passengers—as most of us wished they would soon do with the *Sirius*. In addition to having to cook their own food, they had to supply it ; hence one half of their baggage consisted of edibles. Here was a family with a good stock of semi-tropical fruit, and the remainder hidden in a number of small baskets covered with old cloths. Next to them was a group of young, married people, who had joined their units into a small community for the journey. Amongst them these had mustered six fowls, which lay on the deck, with their legs tied, in a heap, some vegetables, and the usual abundance of fruit—not to omit the inevitable stack of preserved dates. Further on stood three greybeards,

brothers (as I afterwards learnt) with a huge basket of grapes and bananas, a loaf and a half of white bread made *à la Française*, and seven or eight raw ribs of that most savourless and scraggy of all animals—its Indian brother not excepted—the Moorish sheep. A little inboard of these stood a youthful couple—the wife evidently about sixteen years of age, and the eyes peeping over her *adajar*, being anything but young, even at that—in the midst of their luggage, and seemingly already wishing themselves at home again. They, poor things, were like two lost children in a strange town, amongst people who spoke an unknown tongue; while (and, oh, the ironical antithesis of such a mournful picture!) around them, their boxes and a steam-winch, etc., some young ragamuffin-Moors were playing an early game of hide-and-seek, or some Asiatic equivalent to it, at their hearts' content; also to the annoyance of a careful A.B., who was helping to set the main-trysail by driving the winch, and every minute expecting to see one of the frolicking youngsters amongst the winch-gear. Such is human nature, especially in its early years, be its outer colour what it may. At intervals, tied in bunches of two to four or five, were strewn tin kettles, eating and drinking vessels, stewpans, saucepans, frying-pans and pans for other purposes: Because all that the ship provided were a passage, fuel and places for the pilgrims to cook at, water, and some deck or awning between them and the merciless sun.

Presently, and much to our relief, things generally were once more in sea-going order. Then the pas-

sengers received orders to convey themselves below, an action that was performed civilly enough, for your Mohammedan is a most docile being, in the average, whenever authority is strong over him and his fanaticism is quiescent. They took their packages with them ; and, excepting the occasional appearance of one or two on allowable matters, they were seen no more till the following day. So far they were strangers in a strange place—a very strange place to them, one that doubtless gave them some physical qualms which kept them quiet, and caused us a corresponding peace of mind on their account.

During the night we doubled Capes Kamart and Carthage, and in the full light of the next day's upward sun we passed through the canal in the centre of El Bakira, the Lake of Tunis, and dropped our "mud-hook" in the harbour of that ancient city—said to be older than Carthage itself (which fact, if true, it may owe to its lack of early notoriety and ambition) ; at any-rate, it was once known to Moslem writers as Tarshish, and as El Hathera, the Green, on account of its many and wonderfully beautiful gardens, in which it even surpasses that world-known city of gardens, Damascus. Of course, our first human consignment was now on deck again, getting in the way of us and our work. They were eager to see their coming fellow pilgrims ; and, except the patches of dry whitewash that some of them had brought up on their dirty, dingy-coloured garments, they looked none the worse for their night "between decks." (I know not why, unless it be owing to the great difference in diet, but for some reason those

people, unlike our "sea-girt islanders," are rarely troubled with *mal de mer* to any appreciable extent ; and I have voyaged with them more often than suited my tastes.) Soon this second consignment was on board—the first one having watched them come over the side, much as a crowd of our own people on a pleasure steamer eye those who join the boat at another landing-stage.

Again we were away east, on our final run in that direction. An hour after sunset we rounded Cape Bon ; then passed through the Malta Channel, doubled Cape Matapan, and turned the *Sirius's* nose up to the north-east, threaded our way through the Cyclades and headed straight for the Dardanelles and Constantinople—that deceitful and disillusioning apple of Istkahar !—there to pick up our third and last batch. For, in so far as you seldom get a whole cargo at one port, pilgrim-carrying is much the same as picking-up fruit in the Mediterranean—and so considerably damaged fruit some of them are that they must have fallen far and lain long. (I have at times wondered why the Prophet is not so ashamed of them as to give them some imperative sign to come to him in a less disreputable condition, or stop at home until they could do so. I know that I should if I were he. But, then, there are prophets, and prophets, not to belittle any honest man. Besides, to give them justice, they do smarten themselves up at their port of arrival—but whether or not they would do this if not compelled to is another matter.)

I have already echoed the fact that human nature is the same at bottom whatever its colour or creed

may be, differences in manners and diet notwithstanding ; and our pilgrims proved this, if only by their fraternizing here, squabbling there over trivialities, and their general behaviour as items of erring humanity. One noticeable feature, in spite of their common and pronounced hatred of water, was a perverse habit of getting in the way of the bo'sun's morning hose-pipe. However, only one incident of importance took place on our passage eastward, which was this :

In the Algerian party there was a family of three, a young girl and her parents ; while, encamped with four male friends on the opposite side of the deck, was her lover. Now, although he was the accepted one, he, in keeping with their faith and customs, had never seen any more of her than her eyes, hair, hands, and naked feet—so far as I could understand. Nor, as is generally the case, had any of his female relatives yet succeeded in seeing and reporting on the supposed wondrous beauty hidden by her *adajar*.

(It has often occurred to me that if Eastern women were to drop this custom of veiling, there would be fewer marriages amongst them than is now the case. Because their men certainly have a taste for real beauty, and they know it when it is presented to them, whether it be “black and comely,” brown and passable, or white and truly fair. But, then, lump together youth, femininity, and the mystery of imagined beauty, and what will the average man not do to lay it bare to his sight ? Eternity and past time might tell ; no man can do so, although some women may—or, rather, they could, but they won't

play traitors. Talk about the pull of the moon on the ocean—it is not much compared to the pull of some women's eyes. And so long as there are Juliets, of imagined or real beauty, there will be Romeos to fall in love with a voice, make impassioned utterances to a face on a balcony in the dark, and be tied up with priestly gordian knots before they know to what they are being tied. And thus, saith the philosopher, cometh more than half the world's misery ; but the world heedeth not the philosopher.)

Mera and Ibrahim, however—to return to these eastern lovers—were still untied. And, in his plotting heart, he meant to see her face ere that event should come about—half-infidel that he was, despite his journey to the Red Sea—Paradise or no Paradise ; for the face was near, while the hourii were far away, and had the usual uncertainty of distant things. We, in that everyday glorious Grecian weather, were passing through the Cyclades. The dark-skinned pair were talking by the side of the 'midships bunker-hatch, between the bridge and their temporary companion-way. I had already made a sort of unofficial acquaintance with " Pills " (the doctor), by the medium of my half a chest of literature ; and he and I were standing near the rail on the lower-bridge, watching them and their compatriots. In Ibrahim's manner there was a vague yet certain something that fixed my attention. A student of races and racial traits, I was at once on the alert, and pointed out the matter to the medico. He saw it and was keen on the promising fun, every stage of which we noted quietly till the end came.

The lover soon changed his position. This caused Mera to alter hers, so that, when altered, she was facing the hatch-way, the corner of it being between them. Now he sank down on the deck, crossing his legs and squatting on his heels. She was looking aft, and he forward, the lower end of her *adajar* being a few inches below the coamings, against which she leaned. The conversation suffered no break. It seemed that he was telling her how many sheep he had, and dwelling pridefully on the peculiarities of certain members of the flock; also on his merits as a shepherd, and his prowess as a horseman (Oh, the conceitedness of the youthful lover, and his artful meannesses! For if conceited, he is mostly mean in some things.), and of the rare fertility of his father's two fields. Meanwhile, her mother turned now and then, from a vantage post by the opposite bulwarks, and gave a chaperoning glance at them.

Abruptly, without so much as a preliminary murmur, he gave a cry of feigned pain, clapped one hand to the rear of his anatomy, and leapt straight to his feet. His action had the instantaneous effect of making her start suddenly backwards. And, lo, that quick movement jerked the veil from her face and left it bare!

The perfidious young rogue had secretly fastened the edge of that offending screen to the loose corner of the tarpaulin. Then he had produced a formidable pin, and surreptitiously pretended to stick it into himself, as though it had lain on the deck and worked him evil as he sat.

Now he stood facing her, as if thunder-struck, one

hand still on his lagging part, half the big pin showing between his fingers, and his gaze fixed on her horrified face.

She was completely lost in a fit of stupefaction ; the *adajar* being still attached to her and to the tarpaulin, while persons near looked at them in wonder, and horror at the desecration of a woman's publicly exposed face. This lasted, perhaps, half a minute. Then the mother, gathering her scattered senses together, ran to the girl, snatched the veil free of the hatch-covering, and roughly jammed it up to its former place ; but not before every one had seen that her daughter had a large hare-lip, and across the chin a disfiguring transverse scar that had probably been caused by some accident in early life.

Feminine intuition—in this case apparently aroused by justifiable spite—led the elder woman to a right conclusion as to the origin and course of the seeming accident. More years and greater world-knowledge than her daughter possessed had doubtless given her a penetrating insight to the ways of that blunter sex which has made itself lords of creation, especially in eastern matters. However, whether that was so or not, all that day there was great trouble in the “ ’tween decks,” where the parties at once went to discuss the affair, and it occasionally broke out during the whole voyage. In fact, there were times when it came near causing the interposition of authority in the interest of peace and for the prevention of worse trouble !

Yet there was much to be said for the girl and against the young scamp, who had played her a very

mean trick, and a most unlover-like one to boot. In addition to the religious penance which she would have to undergo, for what he had done to her, to a great extent she was ruined for life ; because no man would take her after that exposure, unless her father increased her *dot* to the length of begging himself. Hence there was nothing before her but a life of single wretchedness, and an old maid's death welcomed by her relatives ; who would be all the time looking on her as, and often reminding her that she was, a useless encumbrance.

Fine weather—so important an item on every kind of passenger-ship—attended us up to the Golden Horn.

Stamboul !—distant beauty and reeking odours in a word. There was no wonder that the owner of the green banner of Islam, in that big white house of his up the Bosphorus, was sick so often and so much. There, at the old part of his capital (a decaying bone, over which the political dogs of Europe were, and still are, ready to snarl and show their fangs as to who shall have the picking of it), we added the last batch of our pilgrims for that voyage. Then we hastily left its gleaming minarets, its muezzins sounding over the dirt ; the narrow gutter-like streets and their stench below ; its great bazaar, an ever-moving kaleidoscope of eastern life ; its blue, summer-glinted Bosphorus, with gliding caïques, high and wooded banks topped by palaces and gleams of gilded crescents—in short, a place where only men and dogs were vile.

Our passage down into the Ægean Sea was not

marked by any particular occurrence. But on the Friday evening, towards the end of the first dog-watch, as we were rounding the western point of Mitylene, there issued from No. 2 hatchway a sound as if every Mohammedan below was full of the direst pains possible to man.

“What the hangment’s the matter now!” cried our “old man,” as he glanced along the bridge to the second mate, who had charge of the watch, then gazed down into the semi-darkness of the “’tween decks.” The ascending noise had begun in a mere murmur; but it had quickly, though gradually, risen to a shriek that sounded like “Allah-illa-Allah-Allah, Allah-illa-ah!” and so on *ad libitum*. “Run down, Mr. Nickolson!” the captain added to the officer. “For God’s sake, jump down smart, and see what on earth’s the matter with ’em! There’s murder going on, surely!”

While the “old man” fumed about the trouble of “carrying these heathen,” to which he was unaccustomed, the second-mate slipped below—I and another at his heels, as ordered secondly by the master. On arriving below a single glance proved that at Constantinople we had unknowingly shipped a party of “Howling Dervishes,” a sect that is to the Islam faith about the same as Primitive Methodists, or Salvationists are to the Established Church. They numbered fifteen, and were seated cross-legged in an oval on the deck—so far as we could see in the dim light down there. (These details were subsequently picked up piecemeal.) In each hand was a block of wood, about the size of a half-brick, and having

Turkish and Arabic prayers cut into five of its six sides ; the blank side being on the deck, now here, now there, almost anywhere within arm's length. Their bodies and heads were swaying to and fro like so much india-rubber—right and left, backwards and forwards, then in a circular motion that would have made a nervous person dizzy to look at. They were about three feet apart, and in the frenzy of their devotions it was a wonder that they did not knock their heads against each other. Meanwhile, the same wild shrieking was continued ; then the howlers began the downward scale and at length they finished in that murmuring chant in which they had commenced. The latter part of the affair was like a mournful dirge. When they ceased, I turned my attention to the Moorish party, listened to a more orthodox Imam, the chaplain for daily prayers ; then to a Khetib, the reciter of the weekly prayer for the head of the Government ; noted that Ibrahim now sat on the opposite side of his group to where Mera and her mother were sitting—and wished to goodness that I could understand what they were all talking and chanting, instead of having to pick up bits of gossip and information as chance offered by doing a kindness for one or another of the half-dozen who could speak English.

Here my observations were interrupted by the second-mate making a dash for the companion-ladder, holding his nose and saying that he could stand the stench no longer. I had never been afflicted—or blessed (?)—with olfactory nerves. So I followed more leisurely to the upper-deck, which I reached

in time to hear the "old man" say, after his learning "what the shindy below was about," "Well, if Allah or the Prophet takes that caterwauling for worship, they must be mighty hard-up for it, for I wouldn't take it for sour apples."

During the next day our cargo was increased by a unit. One of the Tunis women was so regardless as to the fitness of time and place, that she there and then presented her husband with a daughter, and thereby occasioned the usual sorrow in a Moslem family at the advent of a baby girl. However, it that day received the commonly preliminary name of Fathma, the cognomen of Mahomet's mother, some say his favourite daughter, and the one always first given to females born into the faith. Seven days later, amid a slight rejoicing because of its being born during the pilgrimage—for which reason it might afterwards prove to be more than generally fortunate—the child was re-named Messoudia, and the event became merely a thing of the past.

Nothing else worth recording happened until early in the morning after we left Suez. It was about six bells in the middle watch, and the mate's turn on deck. Without a moment's warning the welkin became black as Hades, and, allowing no time to take in canvas, a squall burst over us. In an instant the *Sirius* heeled to starboard, tearing ahead withal like a yacht running for a prize cup; while from the hold there came a confused hubbub that grew in volume, intermingled with many a feminine cry of pain and fright.

"Clew up the topsail!" yelled the mate on the

bridge, and his two A.B.s rushed away to the clew-lines. While one eased away the lee-sheet of the sail, the other tugged as if for dear life at the line. But what good could one man do against that straining, bellying piece of canvas, which threatened to burst at every moment? It was a parallel case to a pony harnessed to a church of the Norman period. In the midst of this the officer was on tenterhooks as to whether or not he should leave the bridge. If he did, and anything serious occurred in the interval, his certificate would probably be suspended; if he did not, and the "old man" appeared on deck while matters were in this state, he would receive a sound rating for not going at once to the men's help—truly enough, a common happening on under-manned "tramps." Still the *Sirius* lay over and ploughed along. He shouted. The sailors tugged together, and yelled back their inability to get an inch on the clew-line, but could not be heard by the mate. The pilgrims, well-nigh frightened out of their wits, began to stream on to the upper-deck—the men groping about, heedless of everything but themselves, and gruffly murmuring for Allah and Mahomet to save them; the women moaning the same names.

At this juncture the captain came into evidence. The seaman's instinct had aroused him, telling him that something was wrong on deck. He hurried along the fore-and-aft flying bridge, in his pyjamas, a pair of old slippers, his tall figure rather bent, and his bald head bare. When he reached the open door on the lee-side of the wheel-house he jumped in, startling the helmsman, who almost thought him

some ghost. Within a minute he had given a flashing glance at the compass, the man at the wheel, and was outside, holding on to the jamb of the door, yelling like a madman for the mate, the men, the watch-below, and giving racing orders for the reduction of canvas. In the darkness and noise the mate then slipped down the weather-ladder, on to the main-deck and sprang forward to the help of his men. The other watch—called out by one of the mate's hands, when the "old man" shouted his order—mustered quickly. The sails were clewed and furled, the praying pilgrims driven below, the watch-in dismissed to their beds again, and the decks cleared-up. By this time the squall was past. The stars came out soon, and there was scarcely a breath of wind.

Luckily the weather remained fine until we steamed into Yenbo. The greater part of our passengers were bound for Medina, of which Yenbo is the port—Mahomet's burial-place, to where he fled from Mecca (when the Meccans would have killed him to stop his preaching) on a Friday, July 16, A.D. 622, hence this day being the Mohammedan Sabbath. Some Moslemin say it was on the 15th that he made his epoch-forming flight. But, then, there are differences of opinion in every creed. And what matters a day the more or less?—the disputants will never notice it after they join the hourii.

However, those who were going to the place of their Prophet's tomb now underwent the rare luxury of a bath, then arrayed themselves in the distinguishing snowy garments of Moslim pilgrims,

with the customary narrow lines of red in the men's robes. From Yenbo we steamed away with the remainder of them to Sherm Rabegh. At this place—for the two-fold reason that it was nearer to us than Jiddah was, and that water, &c., were to be had more cheaply there than at the larger port—we dropped our anchor on a ten-fathom-deep bottom, and were presently pleased at being rid of the batch that was bound for Mecca.

On the following day, while we were busy in the 'tween-decks, cleansing and re-whitewashing (and oh, how such were needed !), and while Olaf, Ivor and I were wondering and comparing notes as to how we could get ashore and see something of the place, another pilgrim-steamer came in and butted us end-on, owing to her steam steering-gear going wrong. The damage was not great, as such things go ; but it decided our "old man" to put back at once and have it repaired at Suez. At least, he thought the work could be done at Suez, and if not—well, at Port Said ; and, true enough, it had to be the latter. At the nearer place we took three passengers, one of whom was a shipping-agent's clerk, with whom I (always alert to know men and things) at once struck up an acquaintanceship. From him I learnt the following little story, which is repeated here much as he told it, while we talked on the after-part of the fore-deck. Amongst other things, we had been discussing the everlasting feminine, because of something that had been done by the wife of the other passenger, both of whom were French.

"Woman—fools ?" asked the turbaned degenerate

between philosophic puffs from his hookah, in answer to an old-mannish remark of mine. "No, she more wise than two serpents, and when she love she more gentle than Mahomet's own dove. Bismillah! Listen."

He should have said "wait." During the next few minutes he was silently engaged in attending to his pipe. Meantime the full round moon shone on patches of desert, water and greenery. We were anchored for the night, just within the northern end of the Bitter Lakes, the still face of which stretched away astern; while ahead the silver-looking, moonlit canal wound itself out of sight like a great highway of clean-swept ice.

He began again.

"Listen. . . . Ten—twelve years ago one English steamer struck one Frenchman there." (With the stem of his pipe he indicated the entrance to the canal just ahead of us.) "Ze French boat was going to sink, and ze captain run her on shore by ze signal house. . . . Well," he continued, dropping some of his Frenchman's style of speaking English, which came of his better knowledge of the cross-Channel language, "de men were sent home; but de officers, engineers, and de carpentair was keep by de damaged ship, and some came from Port Said to mend de broken place. Of course, de steamer was here weeks. Well, ze French signalman in de house zair" (again pointing) "had one servant-girl—very fine—what you call very good for ze eyes. Ah, beautiful! Eyes like ze moon, face same as houri, tall, and soft to de fingers. Her mother was Circassian—slave, I think; but her

master give his child freedom, 'cause her mother ask it. . . .

“ Well, she had lover, Musselman, in Ismailia ; but she soon love ze carpentair—he live in tent on shore there with his shipmen. Ze signalman had one fine cow—plenty milk, and Alphonse—de carpentair—go many times to buy milk. He was young, kind, and very pleasing to see.

“ I was what you call taxman here, and I learn all. . . .

“ Well, Alphonse and Joyce (Joyce not her name, but he call her so, and she called that to-day), they meet many times after ze sun go down—so many that Ben Ali come two, three times catch them. Of course he make trouble. Love makes ze coward brave. Think she care ? Not ! She speak some French, and she tell Alphonse that she, what you call, affianced to Ben Ali. Alphonse not care. He love her, he say ; she love him, she say ; so what for care ? . . .

“ Ah, Ben Ali come soon to claim her, then she must go. Ze signalman and French people about take sides with Alphonse, and tell him take Joyce to France. But lovers' wisdom is fool's knowledge. They better know their own business best.

“ Ze ship was nearly ready, then she go to India and come back to Marseilles. One night Joyce creep out of ze signal house. First she run by the lake to were it deep ; there she leave her—her what you call dress and shawl ; then she go quiet back to ze ship's small boat—where Alphonse lie wait for her. Her mother's sister live other side thee lake, and he was to take her there till his ship come

back, then she would go with him in it to France. Of course, de people on zis side de lake was to think she had drown herself, 'cause of Ben Ali making trouble. So was her plan, and ze lover always say his houri's plans are good. It would take Alphonse most ze night ; but what care he ! She would be out of Ben Ali's way ; and was not Alphonse ze slave of his Joyce ?

“ So ze boat put off—Joyce lying down, her great moon-eyes peeping over ze stern edge at ze ship and signal-house. Soon she lift her head and look hard. Then she sit up and say hot words. Alphonse stop pull, and ask what's ze mattair. She make to him to pull hard, and say, ‘ Ben Ali, Ben Ali ! ’ Then she tell Alphonse that she make mistake of ze night. She sometimes have to see Ben Ali for keep peace ; this was ze night she should see him, and run away on de next night.

“ Never mind, if ze Musselman not see them. But—Joyce said quick words. Ben Ali had turned from ze shore, and was making speed after ze ship's boat. He come out of ze canal from Ismailia, and was going to ze signalman's landing-place, when he see ze uncommon sight of boat going 'cross ze lake at night. He miss ze ship's boat, and what you call jealousy sometime make men wise. He give chase. His boat was one old, small thing, made of cane and camel-skin, and he send it through thee water like steamer.

“ Joyce begin to feel 'fraid, talk to herself, and turn about. Ben Ali must catch them, and Alphonse say he go back and fight him. No, say Joyce. Then

she creep to her lover, take his knife, kiss him to say nothing, and tell him to stop pulling two minutes after she leave him, then go round back towards ze ship. He know how well she can swim like fish, and he say no word. In one minute Joyce slip into ze water, like ze night come down, and swim straight for Ben Ali's boat."

Alphonse go on ; by-and-bye him turn, go on again, then sit still. Soon Ben Ali come on, like wild man ; him see thee other boat turn, wonder what ze mattair, and stop to use his paddle. Zat minute his boat have its life took. Joyce stabbed it at ze bow, under water, as it run over her. Then she swim fast to her lover, and Ben Ali begin to sink. He shout for help ; but Alphonse stop as Joyce tell him.

"Soon he see her head in ze moonlight, pull to her, and take her in. Now, Ben Ali's boat gone and he nowhere. Ze lovers say it not right for him to die ; they go to look, and find him sinking last time. He no senses ; they put him in their boat, see that he soon all right, and talk what best to do. In two minutes they do what Joyce say : Lie him face down, tie his hands and feet, and make all haste to ze few houses on ze other side of lake.

"Presently him speak and try to look at them ; then she point Alphonse finish ze plan, and wind Ben Ali's turban round him eyes and mouth. Soon they come to ze shore ; there they leave de Musselman, and go back. Next morning Joyce and ze carpentair tell her master and ze captain what they do, and ze two men send ze lovers to Port Said by ze first steamer into ze canal zat morning. . . ."

“And what became of them?” I asked.

“Bismillah!” said he. “They at Port Said ever since—keeping one fine French estaminet.”

“And Ben Ali?” I added, looking at him as he puffed mutely at his pipe.

“Oh, ze people find him all right when ze day come. In two days he walk round to ze signal house; but ze ship gone, and no one believe his tale. One year and half after he find Joyce and Alphonse at Port Said, but him could prove nothing.”

We sat thinking, and the serene beauty of the warm night was in touch with the silence of semi-desert and canal, all lit up by the great, round moon, which lent to the scene an atmosphere of enchantment, such as one never experiences away from the colourful East. “On such a night did Dido stand and wave his love to come again to Carthage.” It was a night of opalescent, yellowish, and deep, indefinable blue tints, of slumbrous effects, and the magic that alone is Oriental; a scene that was lovely on such a night, yet rather garish and half-barren by day; and an incident that fitted both the night and the scene in a way that appeared to me to make a perfect whole of the three. And so we sat and smoked and thought—I, the romantic-minded young Britisher, in the most prosaic of garbs; and he, the picturesque-looking, practical degenerate.

CHAPTER V

Small matters : Gay colours : And what a change ! : Mohammedan tricks : The "medical parade" : Squabbles below decks : Flirting with a Malay Hebe : The bo'sun duped : A promise of trouble : Jealousies : A many-tongued Frenchman : Love and pathos : Family jars : Burial at sea : A lover's leap : An interrupter : Bad weather : Pandemonium : Mutiny threatened : A pig to the rescue : Our rescuer sacrificed : Mecca madness :
I get a ducking.

OUR first cargo of coloured humanity had to wait a few days for us, no doubt blaming their ill-luck and "those infidel seamen" for putting them to extra expense by prolonging their pilgrimage. In the meantime some of our crew tasted the sweet-bitters of Port Said hells, worse than which there were none at that time from pole to pole. Because of what occurred at one of those places a stoker had to be left in hospital, and we saw him no more. Without any further incident of note we took the pilgrims back to their ports of embarkation, then loaded some general cargo at Marseilles, and steered our way to the Indian Ocean, to replace the bales, casks, &c., with more coloured humanity. As we steamed out of the canal into the Gulf of Suez we passed two "tramps"—an English and an Austrian—aboard which free fights were going on apparently amongst all hands. Our pilot said the vessels were doing twenty-four hours quarantine, and that the crews

had probably been buying "chain-lightning" (gin, also called "Strike-me-dead") from the bum-boats.

Moors, Algerians, Turks and their neighbour-Mohammedans are bad enough aboard ship, as we had already learnt too well. But they were gentry on good behaviour compared to the Malays, Hindus, Abyssinians and others whom we were then about to experience. Of all human creatures to have in charge during a voyage, especially in a breeze, surely our consignment on that occasion was the worst that old mother earth could produce. Years spent amongst some of the roughest men of all creeds and nationalities had led me to think that one religion amongst different peoples was ever a binding factor, at once a social cement and a cloak to hide well-nigh all shortcomings. But that eastern pilgrim-carrying proved my idea to be a complete fallacy.

The first batch of our six hundred-odd, whom we finally landed at that Red Sea port, was picked up in the Malay Peninsula; and a motley crowd it was, in all conscience. Unlike their more northern co-religionists (who had boarded us in rags and tatters), young and old, families *en masse* and single persons, were, on the day of embarkation, attired in all the gaudy hues that the art of dyeing ever produced. But on the following day—oh, what a change was there! It was as if the whole assembly of a gay *bal masque* had dropped their costumes suddenly and stood forth in beggars' apparel. No travelling Indian fakir was ever worse dressed than the whole batch. They needed only a fakir's dirt to sink them

completely to his level. And in a few days every one of them was as unkempt and dirty in appearance as the time and their conditions could make them. There was a serious discussion between "Pills," the "old man" and the mate as to the advisability of giving every mother's son and daughter of them a forcible bath with the bo'sun's hose-pipe, their clothes thrown in. But the possibility of such a very needful liberty resulting in mutiny put a check on this desire.

For the purpose of carrying these cleanliness-forsaken beings (who, of course, supplied and cooked their own food as the others had done), two more companion-ladders had been fitted to hatchways Nos. 1 and 4; two more cooking-ranges had also been put up by the bulwarks on the main deck, and a temporary third deck constructed in the lower hold. On this and the 'tween-decks our unwelcome passengers slept and spent the greater part of their time *en route* for Jiddah—in groups, higgledy-piggledy, like droves of porkers in a huge farm-yard. From six to seven in the morning, ten to twelve, two to four and six to seven o'clock in the evening of each day they were allowed on the upper-deck to take fresh air into their Mohammedan lungs. One of each family or group of single persons was selected to come and go at will for the purposes of cooking; but, adepts at deception, they got the better of us in this by constantly exchanging the duties of cook—except when wind and sea ran high. In fine weather they all wanted to be cooks; in bad weather there was not a cook amongst them. Those two lower decks were

daily washed with the hose-pipe and brooms ; sadly they needed it, and much fun we had at the pilgrims' hurry-scurry and expostulations on the first three or four occasions when this work was done. One of them, an old man who could speak a little English, said that he had never seen so much water wasted in all his life, and he hoped that he would not see the like again.

But our first real taste of the humour of the situation came at “ medical parade ” on the third day, when “ Pills ” had the whole batch made to toe a plank-seam on the upper-deck, for the purpose of giving each one a very necessary, but not too close an, examination as to health. “ Pills ” said that he could not see them well-enough in the semi-darkness of the hold. He was rather short-sighted, and, in truth, not over courageous of making his inspection alone amongst them. Yet this was not much to be wondered at ; he had never before clapped eyes on their like ; and the men, at least, were fierce-looking specimens generally, of even eastern humanity at a discount. The muster took place at four bells in the afternoon watch, when “ Pills ” had safely digested his dinner. He feared that he would not be able to eat any, if he made the examination before the meal.

What a sight they were when drawn up to the plank-seam ! But their appearance was nothing to the way in which “ Pills ” went from one to another along the line. In his right hand he held a slight bamboo about two feet long, in his left a magnifying glass some six inches in diameter, and his movements

were as gingerly as those of a delicate dancing-master of the old school. With one end of the stick he pressed down each one's chin, to get a look at what he—being something of a wag—termed “the medical indicator” (tongue). Nor was he much less rough with the women than with the men, for chivalry was hardly an outstanding idiosyncrasy of his. When he wished to have a peep at one's skin, he used his stick to part the rags on the person's breast, then made an examination, at a safe distance, through the enormous glass. Thus he proceeded along the line till, as he was looking at the tongue of one youthful object, the lad suddenly backed, darted along the rear of the line and sped off to one of their rude cabooses. Having the semblance of a fowl currying for his party, he had left the muster to attend thereto. He was ordered back to his place, paid no heed to the order, so was hauled there by a couple of A.B.s, attendants on the doctor. At that time we were ploughing along under a smart breeze and a beam-sea, which would have made it impossible for them to stand anything like still had they not already acquired their “sea-legs.” Suddenly a breaking wave struck the vessel's side, sent a shower of drenching spray over “Pills” and his examinees, and away went every individual of the little crowd. This ended the matter for that day; but it was regularly repeated on each third day thereafter, except when the weather was too bad to allow the muster.

Next to this “medical parade,” in the matter of fun to us, were the squabbles which the pilgrims had amongst themselves concerning stolen edibles. Our

terms of carrying them provided only, as to food, that the steward should sell them rice and flour at fixed prices, and that they should have enough fresh water for cooking purposes. Hence the greater part of their baggage consisted, as usual, of fruit, bread, vegetables, fowls and condiments ; and much trouble accrued from this fact. (Strange as it may appear, there seemed to be no pious restriction as to their using our water.) Never a day went by without some one accusing another of stealing edibles, and many a fierce, wrestling fight, a muddled and ineffective sort of eastern fisticuff-business, was the outcome. The men could no more use their fists than a baby can walk. But the women, true to their sex the world over, when aroused to fighting pitch, made good use of their finger-nails, and handful of glossy black hair were occasionally torn from their abiding-places. When these quarrels assumed sufficient proportions they were quelled by applications of the hose-pipe—that ever-conquering enemy of theirs—liberally and happily used by the bo’sun, a sturdy, vigorous, laughter-loving Bristolian. It was because of his being so often ordered to this task by the mate, and owing to his fondness for turning the spouting water on the pilgrims, apparently by accident, when washing the decks, that they took such an aversion to him. And thereby hangs a tale.

Amongst the young women there was one of plump form, fair face (as Malay beauty goes) and easy indifference to Christian eyes. To this Hebe of the far east, “ Spunyarn ” (as the bo’sun was familiarly named) took a liking, and never passed her without

a cheery phrase of some sort. At times, when the conditions tended to the safety of the action, he gave her a "chuck" under her plump chin—unresented by her, although it could not be said that she gave him much direct encouragement. He also made her lot aboard more comfortable than it would otherwise have been, which was an easy matter to him; he, owing to the mate's going as seldom as possible to the pilgrims' decks, being practically the master of those Augean quarters below. These attentions of his were no more lost to her co-religionists than they were to us. Not that he meant anything serious by them; for "Spunyarn" was of such a happy-go-lucky nature that he could barely be serious in a gale of wind and a leaky ship. But the matter led to a practical joke that rang in his ears during the remainder of that voyage.

At about two-bells in the second dog-watch, a few days before we reached the Mauritius, there came a gentle tap on the port-light that opened from "Spunyarn's" cabin on to the deck. Tropical darkness had abruptly closed around us at the beginning of the watch; but the Southern Cross glimmered through an atmosphere that was clear as a bell. "Chips," the "doctor" (cook) and "Spunyarn" were playing at "cut-throat" euchre for small squares of ship's tobacco.

"Waat's that?" said "Chips," a Tynesider.

"Don't know," answered "Spunyarn!" "but I'll see," and out he went for that purpose. When he thrust his head clear of the lighted alleyway, he could see nothing for a moment. Then, a few feet

beyond the port-hole, there vaguely loomed a figure in eastern costume. Wondering what this person wanted on deck, and by his cabin-window at such an hour, he stepped out of the alleyway, asking, "What is it?"

"Dat you, bo'sun?" inquired a low, softish voice, which he at once took to be his brownish-yellow supposed inamorata.

"It is," he replied, more gently. "Why, what are you after, Jenny?"—this being the name he had applied to her from the first.

"S-s-sh," murmured she, as he drew alongside of her. "You speaky not loud so. I'z come to hab leetle talk. You not mind?"

"Mind be hanged," he whispered, dropping in with her humour. "I don't mind a broken rope-yarn, if you don't, and the officers don't come along," which was an unlikely happening just then, the time being night and the weather calm. "Come over here." He led her across to the high bulwarks, put his shoulders against the rail, thrust his hands deep into his trousers' pockets and said: "So you wanted to have a chat with me, eh, Jenny?" Euchre and his waiting shipmates were forgotten. "But what would the others (pilgrims) say if they found you here?"

"Oh, I no care for dem—dey not'ing. I—I likes you, bo'sun—you berry nicey man."

His right arm went about her waist, and although it was an ample one he managed, by a little squeezing, to reach well around it. "And you're a very nice girl, Jenny," he said—"nicer than all the others

rolled together. Blow me, but you're a brick to come up like this. I didn't think it was in you—strike me queer if I did."

"Ah, but yous sush a goot man. You gib me goot place for sleepy. You no send de water on me. You so goot to me. I"—then came in a lower whisper, "I lub you, bo'sun."

"And jigger me into fits if I don't love you, Jenny. Give us a"—He abruptly planted his lips on hers. "The devil!" he cried. "Hair on a woman's face! Here!"—But "she" was gone, out of his arms, like a greased bonito, and along the deck aft, leaving a rag of clothing in his hands—just as "Chips" and the "doctor" arose out of the darkness at his elbows, whither they had silently crept whilst the whispered conversation had been carried on.

They laughed immoderately.

"Sold, by thunder," he said, laughing also.

"Yes, sold like a 'shellback' in Petticoat Lane,"

"Chips" answered.

But the joker did not get off scot-free. By No. 2 hatch he tripped heavily over the casing of a steam-pipe across the deck, and, ere he could rise and be away again, "Spunyarn" and his two companions were on him. He turned out to be one of four young men who had grouped themselves close to the party of which "Jenny" was an item. Whenever after that the ghost of an opportunity offered itself "Spunyarn's" hose-pipe was directed at him, without any ill-feeling; which he took in as good part, merely running out of the stream of water and throwing

back some remark anent that night by the forward-bulwarks.

On our arrival at Port Louis, Isle of France, we embarked a parcel of Hindus, sprinkled by Chinamen and Mulattoes—with their usual baskets of clothes and fruit, their saucepans and kettles, their bread and bags of coffee, and all the etceteras of a fortnight's passage. There the Malays replenished their stocks of provisions, and away we went for the Indian ports named on our charter-papers. But not without the mate—who had previously sailed with pilgrims—foreboding trouble, because, against his advice, the “old man” had indulged his fancy for fresh pork by buying a pig there. However, the “grunter” had been shipped and safely housed in his sty forward, without any of our Mohammedan passengers knowing of his presence; and instead of giving us trouble, it transpired that he did us a signal service at a most critical point in that passage to the Red Sea.

Now came a new phase in matters below. It was apparent from the outset that jealousy existed between the different nationalities which we were carrying to Jiddah. Owing to the majority of the last-comers being rather more clean in their habits than the Malays were, “Pills,” the mate, and “Spun-yarn” somewhat favoured them. This gave the Malays an excuse for a certain measure of non-violent antipathy to the others, which they vented mainly in ill-looks and petty pilfering. They, however, being first on board, had secured the best positions; a fact which made the Hindus and Mulattoes discontented, and say as they were “sailing

under *their own flag* they ought to be the most considered." The humour of this we fully appreciated, and it continued until we left the Indian coast.

We were blessed with splendid weather on our way to the north-east, a fact that greatly helped in the pacific study of our passengers as members of the human family—that is the pilgrim part of them, for we were carrying a few cabin-wayfarers of the ordinary kind. Amongst the latter there was a particularly bohemian Frenchman; who, seeing me reading a translation of Molière one dog-watch, at once struck up an acquaintanceship. He seemed to be able to speak, or understand, almost every language or dialect of the whole East, and from him I learnt much concerning the pilgrims. As an instance of this, one evening later on in the voyage—I came upon him sitting on a corner of No. 3 hatch, much as I had once before found a compatriot of his. It was a little while before the pilgrims were driven below for the night, and they were grouped thickly about him in all directions. I asked what had put him into such a contemplative mood. His reply, in whispered English, was—that he was listening to a quiet, family money-squabble in Malayan, a Mulatto's declaration of love in Creole-French, a marriage settlement in Hindustani, a business proposal in Chinese, and to the recital of a Persian tale-teller; which goes far to prove that nine-tenths of the world's time is occupied in matters of money and marriage. Not that he could pay full attention to all the threads of interest then being poured into his ears; but he

was evidently absorbing the gist of them, by the way in which he translated them to me, one after another as he heard them.

To the Mulatto love-affair I revert at greater length, for it was both interesting (to us, at any-rate) and it gave the only note of pathos to an otherwise fairly humorous voyage of varied incident. It was the old, old story of true love and a stormy course. He, almost as handsome as the proverbial Creole of fiction, was the son of well-to-do parents. She—of even features and willowy figure, pathetic in expression and surely marked down by the demon of consumption—was as poor as deserving of pity. Before embarking they had been strangers to each other. Their parties being berthed in close proximity on the “’tween decks” had brought them under mutual notice. From this love had sprung up like the flame of an oiled log thrown on to a red fire. But east, west, north and south the same holds good as regards a *mésalliance*, and naturally the more so amongst southern peoples. His folk were irreconcilably against their love-match, solely on the ground of inequality. Hers were sensible. Knowing her condition, they recognized and admitted that marriage was not for them—at least not with reason. Still, lacking the cold practicality of northern blood, they saw no harm in the love-making, simply because it was destined (so far as they knew), not to end in a wedding. Hence the lovers contrived many stolen moments, but none free of some fellow pilgrim’s gaze. It was at one of these semi-secret meetings that his father caught them, in the brief tropical twilight, and

a "scene" ensued, out of which came further "trouble."

The Malays had brought a priest with them. And to him went the lover, with a heavy bribe, to marry him and his consumptive sweetheart forthwith. The priest was a poor man, not an Andrew Marvel, and he fell to the temptation. A meeting was arranged and duly came about, with the necessary witnesses according to Mohammedan law. But the lover's parents had commenced to keep a stricter watch on his movements, with the result that his father and an elder brother surprised the would-be wedding party, in a quiet and barely observable corner of the lower deck, just in the nick of time to prevent the ceremony. Here was a worse hubbub than before. The priest was threatened with disgrace; but as he had already secured the bribe, he probably did not care a rupee either for the threat or its being carried out—especially as he had done nothing for which he could properly be punished. To regain possession of the money the father went to our "old man," as temporary magistrate of the heterogeneous community—not with any satisfaction, however. For Captain Johnston flatly refused to interfere in anything except in keeping peace on board, a task which he declared to be quite enough for him, or any other one-headed man, to accomplish. "As for two of the pilgrims marrying aboard—well; he didn't mind a brass farthing if they all got married there, the more the merrier, providing there were no ructions about it. We had had births, and very near deaths, so why shouldn't we have marriages?"

Then came the tragic ending of their love-story. She, whilst waiting on the upper deck for him to steal away to her, in those heavy tropical dews, received a severe chill. Four days later we buried her, according to the Mohammedan rites ; the priest, who had been bribed to marry them, performing the funeral service. Scarcely had the body been consigned to its deep, blue grave, when after it the lover leapt. Instantly the upper deck was all in wild confusion. It seemed as though his family would go after him *en masse*. They shouted and lamented, half-climbing on to the rail in their frenzy. About them surged the whole crowd of pilgrims, a mob of fanatics utterly unmanageable. Every other minute the lover's relatives turned and stormed at the poor, dead girl's folk, reviling them as something worse than dogs. What we feared, and certainly appeared imminent, was a division of sympathies by the crowd, and a wild *mêlée* as a climax to the affair.

But this threatened trouble was averted in an altogether unexpected manner. In the midst of the uproar a cockerel, in the hen-coop aft, sent forth his war-note of "cock-a-doodle-do!" Round, as one man, swung the whole mass of lamenters and disputants towards the fowl, their hands up and their tongues shouting for vengeance on him. In some superstitious way, and perhaps in part because of his being a Christian bird (in the matter of possession, at least), his ill-timed challenge meant misfortune to the souls of the departed. Loudly they clamoured for his life, and that on the instant. The priest hurriedly and excitedly explained this to the mate,

who had superintended our part of the funeral arrangements on the after-deck; and he, seeing that something definite must be done without delay, there and then wrung the offender's neck. Thinking further to pacify the clamourers, he made to throw the dead fowl over the side, as an indication of his own anger at and contempt of it; when the priest stopped him, adding the information that such a thing must not be done, as the bird's carcass would contaminate the bodies of their co-religionists in the water there.

Whilst this was transpiring, the "old man" had caused the ship's engines to be reversed, and she was steaming astern towards where the suicide had taken his leap. In the meantime a boat had been got ready, was manned, lowered and pulled away in search of him. All in vain. No sign of him was ever seen again. That night there were bitter wailings and lamentations on the lower-decks. Scarcely one of our crew obtained any sleep before the next day. It seemed to us that the pilgrims were holding some sort of howling requiem for the souls of the unlucky lovers. At any rate, it was a hideous and an infernal noise they made; and although the "old man" sorely wished to put a stop to it, discretion forbade his interference.

On arriving at Bombay, the lover's family turned-tail on their pilgrimage and went home, to the danger, some of the others said, of their souls ever finding an entrance to Paradise.

At that one-time capital of India we embarked a much larger number of pilgrims, then made straight

for the gulf of Aden. Again we—those who had an inclination that way—noted a decided aloofness amongst the various nationalities below. But we were presently called from being amused at their peculiarities, by an experience which no member of our crew was likely to forget. It came partially at the instance of a hurricane that overtook us whilst crossing the Arabian Sea. The north-east monsoon was blowing at the time. We were about half-way across, and towards midnight the wind freshened considerably, increasing in strength as the night wore on. By daybreak a gale was raging at our heels. The trouble began when the pilgrims' cooks came on deck to make their morning coffee, curries, &c. We were then running with a huge sea under the port-quarter. Whilst the men from below were at the cabooses, a roller broke over the rail just abaft the ship's waist, sending half a dozen pilgrims screaming and gurgling against the hatchways and lee-bulwarks; their preparations for breakfast being lost in the swirl of water that instantly swept those at the leeward stoves into its insidious embrace and put their fires out.

Although loud enough was the swish, swish of the water, crossing and re-crossing the deck, as the *Sirius* rolled her way northwards, it was nothing to the frightened yells of the pilgrims. Their cries brought up the others pell-mell. Within five minutes all the adult living cargo was on deck, gesticulating and wildly clamouring for a cessation of the danger. They knew not how such was to be effected. They had no clear idea of the impossibility for which they

asked ; yet that mattered not a whit to them. Have a change in their conditions they must and would, or take the management of the vessel into their own impotent hands. "Pills"—who had done some study at eastern languages—stood into this wild scene of confusion but definite aim, as an interpreter, and apparently in no small anxiety to be out of it. He tried to explain the situation to them, at the same time conveying what he could gather of their senseless demands to Captain Johnston ; who looked down from the after-end of the lower-bridge, foolishly and loudly endeavouring to calm the fanatics by blunt and shortly expressed British logic, and blaming "Pills" for not quieting them. Then the priest, evidently at the strenuous behest of some of his followers, thrust himself forward as spokesman of the crowd.

In the midst of his explanatory oration a second and larger sea boarded us between the main-rigging and the bridge, hurling its great green self at the eager mass of Faithfuls, sending them scurrying through the two alleyways forward—a drove of stampeded sheep before a roaring hound. On the fore-deck they gathered again, and more wildly demanded betterment in the vessel's condition. Surely never previously was a ship-master so harassed, so much at a loss what to do, so impotent at his unenviable position ! The crowd was now completely out of hand. The priest himself had lost all influence over them. Violent mutiny was on the verge of breaking out ; and, all told, we were but thirty-eight against six hundred. It really seemed as if we were in for

a very rough time indeed, with our vessel in the hands of fear-stricken fanatical greenhorns and in the trough of a raging sea.

But we possessed a friend on which we had not reckoned, had not thought of in connexion with a scene like this—namely, “ Denis,” as pigs are always named by sailors. He came to our help at that most critical juncture, and proved to be the best that we could have had under the circumstances. By some means, probably owing to the rolling of the ship—certainly it must have been that, unless it was done by some practical joker in the crew—his sty-door became unfastened, and out he leapt, grunting in satisfaction at his sudden liberty (so said a stoker who happened to be standing in the fo’c’sle doorway at the time). The hero to the rescue—as it afterwards seemed to us, when the danger was past and the humour of the affair disclosed itself—about he turned and along the deck aft. Not that he could run far; the crowd was too great for him to do that. But the foremost members of it saw him making his aimless charge, a charge that appeared to them to be both full of intention and diabolical so far as they were concerned. Then what a hullabaloo there was! Pandemonium let loose and intensified.

“ A pig! A pig!” they yelled in half a dozen different tongues, all heightened and intoned with religious fear; for above the roar of the waters and the whistle of the gale went that warning howl. Then over hatches, winches and their fellows’ heads scrambled those who chanced to be nearest to “ Denis,” as if from the very Prince of Darkness they fled.

It was almost a wonder that some of them did not go over the side in their horror. The others caught the cry and repeated it. Better still, they were seized by the spirit of this new movement. Heedless of wind and rushing seas, of the heavy rolling of the ship and of all but escape from the dreaded enemy, aft went the whole mass, helter-skelter—grunting “Denis” at their heels, oblivious to the magnificent service that he was doing us, yet seeming to understand and revel in the situation. Then he passed the door of the second-engineer’s berth, at the forward end of the alleyway, where the engineer stood, with his head out, and saw exactly how matters were trending. Thus “Denis” received a whack behind that caused him to send up a squeal and double his pace in the pursuit. Down their improvised companionways the pilgrims literally tumbled, making many bruises and worse hurts, which “Pills” had to doctor later on. Never before was a deck cleared of such a crowd in a tenth of the time, and so effectually. Within a single minute there was not a Mohammedan to be seen above the hatchways.

Then the “old man,” quick to benefit by “Denis’s” timely appearance, shouted an order to clap on all hatches; and every man of our crew—except himself, the helmsman and the engineer and stokers on duty below—leapt to obey the order. This capped the situation. The pilgrims were prisoners, in safe quarters, and they remained so until the following day, when finer weather allowed their being released.

But the life of poor “Denis” had to pay for his valuable assistance. That such would be the case

was predicted by the mate. And all too surely, as the action of the young "grunter" had endeared him to our hearts, when the pilgrims were once more on the upper-deck they, without waiting to cook their breakfasts or to have any palaver on the matter, began to clamour for his life. They swore that he had been let loose to contaminate and drive them below; and if they had known of his being there not all the forces in Christendom would have induced them to be his fellow-passengers! As it was they were of the opinion that a penance would have to be performed by every individual of the party, and were doubtful as to whether the whole pilgrimage would not, even then, be in vain.

However, "Denis" was at once led out to sacrifice and slaughtered before the eyes of the gathering, the steward officiating as butcher-priest. The pilgrims then dispersed quietly, to go sullenly about their affairs. Meantime we smiled hugely, cogitated at intervals on the vagaries of religions, and enjoyed the succulent flesh of our peace-offering.

After shipping a small party of Abyssinians we had but little more than to cross the Red Sea and do our ten days' quarantine at Kamaran Island, with its seven fishing hamlets each of a few miserable huts. There we got plenty of good fish from the natives; meanwhile the pilgrims prepared themselves by prayer, &c., for landing on—to them—the holy soil of Arabia.

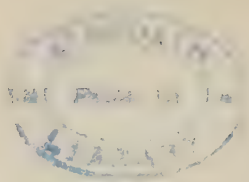
At last we were again under steam. Jebel Ruwadid hove into sight on our starboard side. The sugar-loaf of Jebel Yemenzia being in a mist, our "old

man" waited until Saddle Hill should show itself, (two peaks with a saddle between, 2700 feet high and eighteen miles east of Jiddah). Our anchor was dropped in the inner harbour, on a five-fathom bottom clearly seen through the bluish water, a mile and a half from the town. By this time our quota, of the 40,000 faithfuls annually landed on the Arabian coast, had all disrobed themselves of their rags and donned the spotless white that spoke them what they were. From us they were taken ashore in small boats, which occasionally were stuck in the shallows, and caused some consequent excitement, and no little humour at times to onlookers.

While we awaited their return from Mecca, the mad idea occurred to Olaf, Ivor and me that we would try to reach the holy city. Well, fools do rush to know, while wiser persons wait to be told. And we rushed, on the first Saturday evening, into one of the biggest fiascos and the most hare-brained ventures that three young simpletons ever risked. We started into the thing as a fine jest, thinking to be back on board in four or five days' time, get a reprimanding and a logging from the "old man" and be proud of our exploit—we were to go as three deaf-and-dumb pilgrims. But we returned on the Monday morning, early enough for work, and never said a word to anyone—except amongst ourselves—on our humiliating escapade. Let it pass.

On our passage back to the east, I had the experience of being jerked overboard, from the end of the fore-trysail gaff. However, as the weather was fine, and I could swim, and there being no sharks

quite close, I was soon picked up again—to find a shark loitering near, as we drew alongside to hook the boat to the davit-tackles. It appeared subsequently that one of the male pilgrims had been the cause of my ducking, by surreptitiously letting go the gaff-vang ; but the evidence was insufficient—except for some cause of foolish jealousy—to commit him, so there the matter remained.



CHAPTER VI

Parting company : "Shivers" : A character : His uncanniness : A Bible reader : The lion at bay : Teaching manners : Yarning by moonlight : An impressive beginning : Deepening the atmosphere : "A derelict !" : Uncoffined dead : The murderer : Suicide ? : Confession : A floating pyre : Burning the dead and the living.

*And out of the darkness, out of the grave,
That derelict brought her secret dead ;
For though Heaven weeps, and Hell may rave,
Yet vengeance is sure when blood is shed.*

OF those pilgrims I could still a round, unvarnished tale unfold, but enough—I hope the reader does not add, "and to spare." From Calcutta we took a load of seeds, some jute, &c., to Havre—after having been told that we were to go to Leghorn and the Black Sea and so home.

We left the *Sirius* in Cardiff. My two chums went back to the Tyne, for some summer pleasure with friends they had there, and from that day to this we have had only exchanged photographs and our escapades by which to remember each other. Nor is that unusual ; for the thousands of human ingredients who are, year in, year out, being mixed, separated, re-mixed and broken up again by the ever-moving circumstances of merchant-service life, seldom meet each other twice in their lives. I shipped east, for the east was always my attraction ;

but, as on two or three previous occasions, I had to go round about to get there. That is the s.s. *Ethelburga* was bound to the Cape and Port Elizabeth with "pickled" sleepers, railway metals and the like. But one of the most outstanding features of the voyage was that it first made me acquainted with "Shivers," who, next to Old Shells, was the most memorable character whom I met in the whole course of my vagabondage. As bo'sun of the *Ethelburga*, his name—Richard Garfell—was known only to her articles. Nor was this because of his position aboard, nor in any way due to the fact that "bo'sun" always drives away all thought of any cognomen except its equivalent "Spunyarn." In a working way he regularly received his nautical title, but in all out-of-ear references to him it was "Shivers."

His mere appearance was sufficient to single him out of a crowd. Yet the telling impression came with a knowledge of the inner man, or such of it as one could get at through his everlasting sphinx-like bearing. A lack of flesh made his six feet two inches of bone, wiry muscle, and parchment skin seem to be a good hand's-breadth taller than they were.

About him there was ever a peculiar, inexplicable air that repelled any true familiarity. Even I, to whom the old man had taken so unaccountable a liking that our shipmates soon jocularly spoke of me as "Shivers' son," or "the son of the queer fellow"—I could never quite rid myself of a certain "creepy" feeling whenever those strange, steely-grey eyes of

his were fixed on me in our quiet dog-watch talks together, and I can feel it now. I say "together," because he rarely passed more words with any other member of the crew, "Chips" excepted, than the work in hand necessitated. Of this curious trait of his he commonly appeared to be unaware ; but at times, when a man chanced to blurt out an injudicious remark anent his past, he would give the man a look that plainly said : " So you would overhaul my log-book, would you, and see what course I've run ? No, you don't ! " And the barrier was impassable as a heavily surf-washed reef to an ordinary dinghy.

Those uncanny glances were never more than momentary, and their effect on the seeker after hidden things and doings was the cause of that byname of Shivers. They usually occurred in quiet moments, when one could watch him in repose—that is, while he leaned against the rail, or sat on deck smoking his evening-pipe. Immediately after the eyeshot he would make some casual remark about the weather or the work then in hand, his tone on such occasions being always one of quiet indifference ; or he would silently disappear into the cabin which he shared with " Chips," to the latter's daily and secretly expressed dislike. Whenever he adopted this mode of evasion, the one who had reverted to his past invariably found it impossible to keep away the feeling that the bo'sun's keen, steady gaze was fastened on him through the porthole of the berth ; and no matter how the man strove to quell that uneasy impression, an inclination would grow

on him to put some solid obstacle between himself and that little, circular piece of glass.

Beyond his plain avoidance of any reference to his past life there was no real evidence as to the cause. Yet at the end of our first week out from home some of the more impressionable of the crew suddenly awoke to find themselves, almost irrespective of will, looking on him as one who had both sailed under some kind of black flag, and had assisted in carrying "black-birds." * Certainly he was old enough to have done these things in some parts of the world. This naturally lent strong colour to the whole idea. Despite his being straight as the foremast and still having uncommon strength, he was sixty-four years old—a truth which he never attempted to deny nor ever paraded. To me he was a mystery, and my respect for his memory keeps him one still.

That his hands and features made a battered picture of stormy memories goes without saying. He did not shave, and the greyish-black hair about his face, which might have improved under the influence of a razor, was of a straggling "down-east" character—as though it was the first, sparse, wiry crop of stony ground. To look at his long, bony arms when resting, one would hardly think that life existed under their mummified covering.

Another peculiarity he had was the fact that he always impressed strangers with the thought of his being either a German or a Scandinavian; this was in defiance of his accent being thoroughly English, unmarred by any touch of dialect. He signed himself

* Black slaves, now "indentured" labourers, in the South Seas.

on the steamer's articles as a native of Blackwall, but no one believed the statement. He was a good penman, a fact that, in itself, was not merely remarkable. In the minds of his shipmates it aroused suspicions as to his former life, as such accomplishments always do in a fo'c'sle. Arguing from this, some said that he must have been a New South Wales convict ; but, be that as it might, a finer seaman never trod a ship's deck.

His well-thumbed and ever handy Bible bore full witness of his surprising knowledge of its contents ; yet he never talked religion, morality, or any kindred subject, nor could anyone at any time draw him into a discussion on any matter but seamanship. In detecting an effort to lead him into other topics he had the unerring instinct of a bird alighting on a twig. In his quiet, uncommunicative way he was as religious and as moral as ever man could be. Never did he close his eyes in sleep without reading a portion of his Holy *vade mecum* ; for to him it was this, to the extent that if he went ashore to enjoy a stroll during an evening he put the shabby little volume in his pocket, to con its pages as opportunity or need should serve. Blow high, blow low, things go right or accidents happen, men growling and officers crusty, or all " shipshape and Bristol fashion," hardly a smile was seen on his face during the whole of the time I knew him ; nor did he show anger on more than two occasions.

To complete the picture of him, I bring the two following incidents from a later voyage. The first occurred while we were loading grain off Taganrog,

in the Sea of Azov. A big, lumbering Cossack,* one of the surly order, needlessly jostled against the bo'sun, as the latter was carrying his dinner from the caboose. This caused the almost boiling soup to spill over the bo'sun's hands, yet his remark to the man was of a truly pacific nature—a probable reason why the Russian replied with a particularly offensive epithet. It might have been the suddenness of the insult, or perhaps its very brutality; but which or whatever it was that roused the sleeping lion, it most effectually did its work. The bo'sun had sufficient understanding of Russian to know what had been said to him. Scarcely were the words out of their speaker's mouth, than the Englishman's great hard fist struck him squarely on the face, dropping him in a heap on a handy roll of hatch-tarpaulins.

Instantly there was a rush from all quarters, the Muscovites being fifty to the English dozen. But, as though there was not an atom of further danger, the long, lean striker stood calm and erect, the remains of his meal circled in between his left arm and breast. His lightning fit of passion seemed to have utterly spent itself with the blow. Its only indications were the still clenched hand, a grim firmness about the mouth, a dying glitter in his eyes, and the prostrate form of the Cossack. The chances were that his unconscious pose—the unmistakable fact that there stood the righteous master-hand at bay—

* It may interest the reader to know that in Russian ports soldiers do, or did, labouring work aboard ship, and receive a few copecks of what they earn, the remainder of the money going to the State. They are, or were, allowed to do this as a favour!

was the sole cause of the Russians remaining at a respectful distance, until the heat of the matter cooled down.

Among the first to appear on the quietening scene was the dandy little mate. He arrived just as the insulter regained his feet, apparently not quite certain as to what had happened, and undecided how to act. The officer, trembling worshipper of authority that he was, would have immediately given the brave old salt into the mercilessness of the policeman on the quay. But "the old man" put in a timely appearance from his cabin, whence he had seen the affair, and settled matters into their proper bearings.

The other incident took place at Alexandria. For days past the captain's "boy" (a strapping Arab youth of about twenty years, engaged to accompany the master as a sort of page, porter, and guide combined) had systematically annoyed the bo'sun in well-nigh every way he could. He chanced to be a particularly interfering and aggravating "boy," and had fastened on the quiet bo'sun as a fitting target for his unwelcome "pleasantries." But the nail was clenched one evening while the old man sat on the door-sill of his berth reading the Bible. His pest, appeared from aft, found himself a neighbouring seat, and scoffingly said, to the best of my recollection :

"What you read dere, bos', eh ? . . . Oh, I see—what you call Bible. Ah, dat all same as de cotton-seed—no goot ! Yes, you look—I look, too—you ol' slave-driver. Yes, I know—you one time take slaves

in Red Sea dhow—yes, I know.” After this chance shot came a pause, and the bo’sun turned his piercing eyes from the Arab to his reading. “Say,” the tormentor recommenced, “you put dat fool-book down, den come ’shore long me—I show you house where plenty fun, fine girls, and——” He threw his fez at the volume, knocked it out of its owner’s hands, and the next instant he writhed in the grip of a very devil of determination.

The bo’sun’s far-reaching fingers encircled his neck in a manner that threatened him death on the spot. By that clutch he was literally carried to the rail, squirming much like an eel held remorselessly by its gills. In his captor’s other hand was a piece of pork-rind, snatched at the moment from a platter by the fo’c’sle-doorway. On the edge of the rail the bo’sun pinned his chest, seemingly oblivious to his struggle to escape; then, almost under the noses of a score or so of the youth’s co-religionists, he smeared the spluttering face with that pork grease, then thrust the rind into his mouth and let him go.

This, of course, cost the interfering Mussulman a severe penance; yet he never again troubled our bo’sun.

But to return to when and how the mysterious old man told me the following story, which I repeat in substance, circumstance, and much the same in actual words; for on the following evening I wrote it down largely in his own phrases. As in the case of the *Algitha*, we coaled at St. Vincent, Cape de Verde Islands; and, just as we had expected, the Portuguese authorities put us into twenty-four hours’

quarantine. This meant that while we lay at anchor in the bay our letters home were taken from us in a net-bag at the end of a boathook, and that we seamen had to "hump" the bags of coal from rail to bunker-hatches, while the stokers stowed it below. But as we arrived late in the day, night came and stopped the work. Then, after bathing in the deck-tub and having some tea, Shivers and I were sitting together on the fo'c'sle-head, smoking, reading now and then by the light of a brilliant moon, talking at times of anything that occurred to us—including that curious sugar-loaf islet in the middle of the little land-locked bay, with its lighthouse on the top, that, backed by the dark ground of the island beyond, seemed so like a white, huge, inverted note of exclamation dropping heavy-end-first from the heavens. Amongst other things we talked about the mystery of the sea, to which subject my reading and our surroundings lent colour, also of the way in which the sea appeared to lend itself to human mysteries.

"Mystery," echoed Shivers. He put down the Book, took a long, reflective pull at his pipe, and fixed a contemplative look on the lighthouse. Presently he said: "Listen, and I'll tell you the mystery of a man I sailed with. . . . All things between the cradle and the grave are on the ocean, the most being unknown, unguessed, although within touch of our hands. Birth, life and death, love and hate, cowardice and heroism, murder and self-sacrifice, all are here. . . . 'Ocean, now, with all its waves, cannot wash out that dye.' . . . Its discovery was

fate's own doing—a part of the ordered course of things. . . .

“And he?—just a man, complex though he was; a big, fair, blue-eyed, generally well-behaved fellow of about thirty-three years, and queer moods; now superlatively gay, then morosely silent; at times a cynical sceptic, on occasions eminently solicitous for the well-being of the good-for-nothing cat that belonged to his enemy, the cook. In common matters, such as spring of insight and intelligence, he was not so ignorant as many of his fellows were; nor so broad-minded, by reading, as some are. Neither was he a man to love greatly nor dread unduly. In all he did he seemed natural, and true to himself. In being inconstant he was man-like. In his faults lay his intense human nature, and our close links with him, we being of a most similar make, and were to our own as steel to steel—with him whom we touched yet shuddered not; with whom we lived, slept, ate, shared pleasures and hardships, laughed, argued, jested, differed, agreed and exchanged the common kindnesses of shipboard-life. Wayfarers, as you know we all are, temporarily banded by the drift of circumstances, regardless of the past, careless as to the future; nautical epicureans, so be that winds are aft and fare is good. Brothers we were for the present, held by the mutual tie of a mutual purpose, our vessel and officers being homely ones; we asked into no man's past, required of no man a diploma of perfection, nor thought of love or murder.” He paused a moment, with a far-away gaze fixed between the lighthouse and the western shore. Meanwhile I

waited in suspense. Then he resumed, in that curiously even, dispassionate tone of his, a little flat; and in that steady flow of words, seemingly to himself, which he rarely used except in his yarns to me, and sometimes made me as suspicious of his past as were others of the crew, who had no knowledge of how he could talk. On this occasion—his first real yarn to me—I could only listen and wonder.

“Outward bound we were, from Batoum to Java, with a hold full of raw petroleum in square tin cans; and the brig already ten months from home. After a good passage from the Black Sea to the ‘Rock,’ we had spent two days under Ape Hill; then a fair breeze had carried us through the Straits and well into the Atlantic. Now we had outrun the trade wind, had fetched up in a lower western longitude than our ‘old man’ intended; and the ‘doldrums’ lay between us and those ‘brave west winds,’ that should bear us on—and on—and on, to run our easting down; yes, and to find a ghastly tragedy that had refused to go to the bottom. . . .

“Eight-bells in the middle watch it was, and the brilliant Southern Cross went paling towards the horizon away our lee-beam. It was Christmas morning, and a Sunday to boot. The dying breeze barely ruffled the face of that intense blue through which we slowly surged in the direction of the ‘line.’ One by one the stars receded into the ultramarine overhead—tender gleams of a softer light retiring before the garish beams of day. . . . One bell in the morning watch; then a pinky, grey-whitening of the horizon in the east-north-east, a pause; next

a few vague shoots of light into the darker grey above ; a rising clear over the water's edge, straight and apparently smooth, of a mighty disc of molten fire, red-gold, and seemingly half-asleep—and lo ! day had come. Almost before you could turn to the opposite side of the heavens, this spinning globe had rolled night out of sight on its ever-eastering face. For to the sailor, as you know, what was east yesterday will be west to-morrow, and the west of to-morrow will have become east.

“ He—our bo'sun he was by rating, and our friend by chance and temperament—he had joined the brig at Constant', where our former bo'sun had been put ashore with a broken ankle. He turned over in his blanket on the lee-side of the main hatch, sleepily muttering something in Swedish—a language he had learnt whilst sailing in Scandinavian vessels. One of the mate's watch he was—the middle watch-out—he had stretched himself there on being relieved. About him were others ; but by his side, as I look back at him now, they fade into the grey, enwrapping gloaming of memory—men who were, yet might never have been, so little do I remember them—all those years ago.

“ The light wind was spent. Not a catspaw stirred the surface of those interminable waters. By coffee-time all shadows were gone. Then the bo'sun went to his berth, after having had a mugful of the black liquid with the watch-out—not one of the crowd thinking of what that Christmas day was to bring to us and to him.

“ Our second-mate began to examine the horizon

with his glasses. . . . Had the fleeing night left any of its secrets behind, there on the sea's great, mysterious face? Yes. Away under the lee-bow, day had discovered us something. But what was it? Our young officer could not make it out, so he went to the fore-castle-head to get a better view. . . . The watch, except the helmsman, went too—gazing in silence at the object. . . . Then the cook left his galley to look, and we whispered to one another: 'A derelict, a derelict.' " . . .

It was a noticeable fact that Shivers never gave the cook his usual sea-name of "doctor;" nor did he ever abbreviate such words as "forward," "fore-castle," "windward," as ninety-nine per cent. of seamen do. Once more the easy, steady flow began.

"Yes, that which had grown commonplace because of long custom—the ocean—had given us one of her dead, with something a thousand times worse. Out of the shrouding mantle of night had come one of its countless mysteries. We were oppressed into solemn silence at the sight of that awful thing lying apparently motionless some five miles away. Out of the night we, too, had come—crawling along the face of those mighty waters; seeming to us to be all the world had left in it with the power of independent motion; sloths idly dragging ourselves out of the measureless cavern of uncertainty behind us; now two pieces of driftwood by chance brought face-to-face on the stream of circumstances. Practical moderns though we were, at times selfishly callous, yet intuitively, shapelessly,

we certainly must have felt the truth of this—that we, the derelict and us, were God’s wanderers meeting mysteriously on the face of the more mystic ocean. . . .

“ You are aware that those who have only voyaged over a pair of throbbing engines cannot know more than a tithe of the stilling loneliness that covers and fills a sailing ship in a calm on the high seas. That loneliness and the solemnity of our discovery hung over the brig like a gigantic pall of death. For had we not before our very eyes a returned traveller from, that bourne beyond the grave—a veritable ghost—yet one that might have the living in its charge, might be bringing from the grave that which was still undue to its oblivion? Yes, and the thought put into us such new life as could only be occasioned by an aftermath of feeling, a powerful reaction. There were no wishes for ‘a merry Christmas.’ The very character of the day was forgotten.

“ The pall of oppressiveness was thrown off at one vigorous fling; the ‘old man’ was called; a boat was prepared, and the noise brought all hands hurriedly on deck. Intelligence becomes acute at such times; even the dull are sharp-witted then. The news was grasped as sinking men snatch at chance planks. Excitement so governed each member of our company that not one gave more than a passing, unobservant glance at his shipmates. But impressions do not always make themselves most felt at the moment of reception. So it was then with some of us. . . .

“ When the day’s strange happening was over, and that flaring pyre left—an indicative red glow in the shrouding darkness astern—we could, we did, remember and talk of that strange start given by the bo’sun when he sprang on deck and saw what had put the brig into such commotion. Yet no word said he to indicate that which we afterwards knew must have been passing in his mind, as the boat was hoisted out and other things were made ready. Breakfast was forgotten, though the cook now and then ran into his galley to attend to it. The decks were left without their customary wash-down. The jolly-boat put off with four strong oars, such necessities as might be required, and the second-mate in charge of her. Not a man remaining behind, the bo’sun excepted, but wished to be in the boat ; not one of us five who did not half-desire to be back on the brig’s deck. In their minds was the question no doubt : ‘ What will they bring back ? ’ Ours was : ‘ What shall we find ? ’ Therein lay a whole universe of pathos, speculation, horror. Whilst the bo’sun’s secret query must have been : ‘ Is it her ? ’ Each one of us five had a different mental picture of the scene to which we were going. Not a word was said at the parting. All orders and advice had been previously given. Now the only breaks on the pregnant quietude were the occasional creaking of our vessel’s spars and the slight jolting of the oars as they moved in the rowlocks. It was one of those times when thought is too heavy for words.”

He laid his pipe on the deck, where we sat, our legs stretched out and our backs against the railings ; but

he did not look where he put the thing—his gaze was still straight out of the harbour's-mouth.

“ The sun was fast gaining power. Mercilessly his beams struck the glassy, greasy water, causing about us a heat that, added to our exertion, soon became somewhat stifling. Still, the dip, dip, dip was maintained, the officer taking his turn at an oar, and the released man presently relieving another, the perspiration almost blinding us, our bare arms scorched to the point of blistering. Then we drew near enough to see that the derelict had been a barque. The jagged stumps of her main and mizzen masts stood several feet above the rail. Her fore lower-mast and bow-sprit were intact, but her bulwarks and rails had been torn away, mostly by the weight of wreckage that had hung to them ; whilst along her sides frayed ropes and lines dangled in, or just out of, the water. . . . Now we saw the green slime on her planks, 'twixt wind and water, and the general weather-worn state of her upper woodwork. Many a full and many a waning moon must have shone on her since she was last in a navigable condition.

“ ‘ Lay in your oars and stand-by,’ said the second-mate in a hushed voice. The order was obeyed, somewhat in the spirit of mourners preparing their confined-dead for the last funeral rite, yet with an expectancy which the sadness of the moment could not quell. We shot alongside the hulk and grasped some of the slimy ropes' ends. They gave way in our hands, and we held on to the holes in her bulwarks, for she was low in the water. The officer sprang at the rail, rolled over, and came back with a suddenness

that caused us four to leap on to the boat's gunnel and peer aboard the derelict. . . . Horror—and the stench was sickening. We dropped, even as he had done.

“Night had given up to us a floating grave, with its main contents uncovered to the rays of that decomposing sun. We had found, not castaways to rescue, but some of the sea's unburied dead to entomb in its waters. Five of them there were (as we then thought), two crushed under the fallen mainyard, and three—one that of a boy—huddled together in the port corner by the break of the poop. . . . We sat looking at each other. . . . What further horrible sights had the castaway-packet to give us? . . . The second-mate wetted his handkerchief, tied it over his nostrils, then reluctantly climbed on board. With three of us the mystical attraction of the unknown was too great to resist. We followed. . . .

“The worst lay there on the open deck. By the three in the corner lay the starved carcase of a retriever that had evidently died while licking the hand of the boy. In the cabin there was not a paper, word, or other sign to tell her name, whence she came, or whither she had been going. Where her name had been on the taffrail there were but three letters, ‘RÖM’; the rail bearing the remainder had gone. Of food or fresh water she had neither crumb nor drop. In the forecastle were some chests, but nothing in them by which to identify her, beyond two Scandinavian male names and the usual variety of flags painted inside the lids of the chests. By the

foot of the foremast, under some old canvas, we discovered the remains of a sixth body, apparently the victim of an accident or of some intent, for the skull had been crashed in and a handspike lay beside it. After re-covering this repulsive object we noticed the remnant of an ensign hanging to the foremast-head. On examination it appeared to be Swedish, but the yellow was too faded for us to be sure of that. She was laden with coal, had leaked somewhat, and we left her, immeasurably glad to get away.

“ When we reached the brig, the distance between the two vessels had been lessened by a fourth. Our breakfast was served to us, while a consultation was held aft. During this there was the inevitable talk in the forecastle and about the decks generally—talk of the derelict, her appearance, the things which she certainly suggested, her gruesome deck burden, and of other obvious matters relating to her. The men’s separate styles of receiving and commenting on these items of information, and the network of guesses emanating from them, I have forgotten. But he—the at once attractive and repellent fair man of curious moods—he claims an attention that cannot be envied.

“ The Cain-branded (as he was afterwards seen) forefront of that little crowd of stirred humanity, his actions, his talk, his looks, were not as those of his shipmates—not one ; nor did his ways—as we then saw them—in any tangible sense indicate the self-accusing weight of guilt on his mind, revived at the news we had taken back to the brig, as it naturally must have been. For how could he avoid the

alternating doubt and certitude that the vagaries of unsure fate had, with mocking, accusative irony, brought him back over the pathless ocean to his crime and its scene? Past moodiness severed him from any second thought as to an undue strangeness of manner; nor was this such as might raise suspicion even in the mind of a stranger. At that first burst of the tidings, 'A derelict with six dead hands aboard,' he had turned away to take in the slack of the swaying fore-sheet, making use of an ordinary remark whilst hauling in and belaying the rope. Thereafter, till the startling moment of his self-condemnatory act and that awful cry of uncontainable guilt, his attitude towards the lost and lonely ocean wanderer was just that of the average seaman of long experience—negative interest, mild callousness, and indifference half-sympathetic. That he was, and remained, in a dull mood marked by spasmodic little bursts of impatient anger, went for nothing. All the change of mental bearing—within sanity—were duty-free to him and unchallenged by us. Maybe his suspicions as to what circumstances had now done for him, his position, had given him a frame of mind that was neither strange nor too common to him. Whether or not such was the case, when the line of action was settled on aft, and he ordered by the skipper to be one of the boat's half-new second crew, he obeyed, without a single excuse that he had other work to do.

"Twenty large tins of petroleum were put into the boat, under the direction of the bo'sun, who did not expend one needless word in seeing it done. The

old mate took charge—his instructions being to read the burial service on the deck of the derelict, then set her on fire. This was the best means we had of sending her to where she should have already been. As for the bodies, they were too far gone for handling, and not a man in our company could have been persuaded to touch them—not for a twelve months’ pay. When half the distance was covered a gentle wind sprang up, and the brig followed us.

“ Again we began to board her, on the weather-side, now well-on in the afternoon. The bo’sun, from his place at the stroke-oar, was the second man on board—he following, mechanically (as it now seems), at the heels of the mate. A fathom from the gap in the broken rail he paused, his gaze curiously wandering fore and aft. By some strange, undefinable, probably occult, unguessed power every eye in the little party was fastened on him. His manner was magnetic—forcibly attractive in an awful sense. With his gaze fixed forward, he abstractedly murmured :

“ ‘ My God, that I’ve come back ! ’ ”

“ The mate looked at him as though he would question the meaning of those significant words, but the bo’sun moved towards the barque’s head. Three slow paces he took, seemed to hesitate, then leaped along the deck groaning loudly :

“ ‘ My God, my God ! Kill a man, kill a man ! ’ Further than this we heard not. What else he said was more mumbled than spoken, as he tore to the foot of the fore-mast and drew aside that shrouding

piece of tattered canvas. 'Me, me, me!' he shrieked, when the corpse lay bare. 'I did it! I, I, I!' And without another word or an instant's pause he had gained the opposite side of the derelict and taken a wild leap into the sea on the starboard side.

"Across the deck we ran, the mate ordering the boat around as the rush was made. This took us back pell-mell to the port side, into the boat and round to leeward, where the mate was leaning over the side and looking for the reappearance of the bo'sun. But he never came up again—that is, so far as we saw. We hung about for some time, however, thinking he would come up, then the mate called us alongside. He got into the boat and told me to remain on the derelict till they returned. He was going back to the brig, he said, to tell the 'old man' what had happened, and see if there were any further instructions for him. I was to keep a look-out for the bo'sun's body in case it came to the surface.

"After watching for ten minutes or so I thought I heard something behind me, and turned sharp round to see what made the noise. But there was nothing in sight that could have made any noise. I was standing along by the fore-rigging at the time, and I soon felt sure that I did hear something moving in the forecastle. As we had all looked into every nook and corner together, I was not afraid to go there now. But you can be sure that I jumped back when I saw the bo'sun cowering in the gloom in a corner.

"I stood at the doorway asking him how he got

aboard. He had dived under the vessel, he said, and slipped aboard over the port side while we were all busy on the starboard. Then he begged me not to say a word about him when the others came back. When I asked him why, his answer was that whatever was done to the barque he would suffer the same fate. Being a strong swimmer and mortally afraid of sharks, he had been unable to drown himself. That was why he had dived under the hulk and climbed up the opposite side. Then in a few hurried words he told me that, castaways all as they were, the remains of a furious gale, he had, at night, put their small stock of provisions into the only boat (which had been launched in readiness because they thought the vessel might sink at any moment); and he was on the point of making off with her and leaving his shipmates to starve, when one of them awoke and discovered him. The result was a fatal blow with a handspike, then a hurried leaving, feeling all the time that he had done a murder. On the second day he was picked up by one of those old-time trans-Atlantic liners sailing from Marseilles, and carried there. He was afraid to say what would have led to his former companions' rescue, lest the words of his own mouth should put him into a hangman's hands. Thus he had purposely killed one man, and had been the cause of five others dying. During some months spent on the Mediterranean, he said, he had suffered all the horrors that conscience could make him; and now he felt sure that the hand of God was in it all, and he would take his punishment in his own way. . . .

“ Well, I was not a parson to debate on what then appeared to me to be the small issues of the matter. He would have to die for his crime ; and at that time of life I not only thought the better of him for his determination, but it seemed to me that it was the wiser course to leave him there to die as he chose, than to have the unpleasantness of carrying him with us, in irons as he would be, till we reached a British port, to be hung at last. Some might call it helping a suicide to put an end to himself. I did not see it in that light. However, I heard the oars in their rowlocks, told him so, and said good-bye, then went to the vessel’s side to meet the boat.

“ There was no change in the orders, and as the breeze was freshening there was not a minute more lost. Under the mate’s directions we spilt the oil about ; then he made his last ascent of that poop-ladder. By the fore-rail of the little elevation he took his stand, on the opposite side to those three who had been companions in misfortune, then left foodless and boatless to be comrades in death. The declining sun lit up that dead-strewn deck with a golden irony that would have been a blessed decoration on a more holy scene. In my mind, boldly prominent in it all, and not far from his uncovered victim, hid the mortal cause of the whole, for whom there was now no escape. The gentle breeze stirred soft ripples in its passage, and seemed to murmur a requiem for those slain sons of its waters, as it passed over and about the derelict.”

Here Shivers made another brief pause, then

continued without the least change of tone, but not without some increase of impressiveness.

“ With bowed, bare heads in the drooping sun’s rays we listened reverently to the low, gruff tones repeating: ‘ We therefore commit his body to the deep.’ Our hunger was forgotten. Apparently alone on the sea’s mighty surface, numbed by the oppressive rite and the seemingly endless stretch of loneliness; in effect, present with only the boundless ocean, its dead, the guilty, and their God—what wonder that we, rough men, living hard lives in a recurring monotony of hardships, were awed to an exact fitness with what was happening? One of us four was a grey veteran of the waters, and no smoother at heart than its average appearance, yet were his cheeks wet as our younger ones. We wept for those who had none else to weep for them—as it might fall to our lots that strangers should some day weep for us.

“ That peculiarly oppressive rite was over. The poop, forecastle-head and amidships, had been saturated with oil. At a word from the mate the two ends of the vessel were lighted in one moment, then the lighters leapt back to her waist. Quickly we sprang into the boat. A burning piece of oakum was thrown at the deck we had left. Fresh flames followed it, and we pulled away. Within five minutes the murderer shrieked and again leapt overboard, towards us. Of course, we pulled back at once; but he was never seen more; and I let my shipmates talk—it was best to say nothing of what I knew. . . .

“ The sun went down in a halo of colour as the boat

swung in-board. Our helm was put up ; the yards were once more squared ; we bore away from the flaming derelict, and we of the boat's crew went below to our late Christmas dinner ; but I ate little of mine. The light breeze held on. Night came down, fair as this night is. On the horizon astern the burning castaway lit up the heavens till a little after six-bells in the first watch, then all became suddenly dark, and we concluded that she had buried herself and her dead."

CHAPTER VII

How Shivers impressed his listeners : Increased reserve : The "doctor" spins a yarn : An uncommon shrew : Cruel punishment : A boy's ruse : Mutton versus hunger : A dog's hint : "Ingenooity" : Shivers tells another tale : A terrifying malady : "Yellow Jack ?" : Death after death : A hopeless crew : Impenetrable gloom : At Port Louis : The "plague" explained.

WHEN the bo'sun had finished his story, we sat in utter silence, so far as we two were concerned—silence which, for the beauty of its scene, and the calm, warm, translucent night, was not unlike that in which the shipping-agent's clerk and I sat, at the north end of the Bitter Lakes, immediately after he told me the tale of Mahmud and Florette. But the mood of the moment was very different—in place of the amusement, the light and genial outlook on life which that episode *du cœur* had set moving in both the turbaned degenerate and me, there was—in me, at any rate—a strong sense of oppressive mystery, of the threefold mysteries of fate, life and the ocean worked into one. Nor did the unquiet talk of our shipmates, on the well-deck just below us, make any appreciable difference either to our silence or to that sense of a cryptic nemesis in and with which I was visualising the tragedy, and, at the back of my mind, remembering the case of Hilmar, the Swede, in the *Martha Webster*.

One of the curious features of Shivers' story-

telling—as I then felt and was to learn more truly on subsequent occasions—was a remarkable power to impress his listeners with all the reality and mysteriousness of what he said. Indeed, with a slight exception in the story of the green coffee-berries, this was always the case. Nor did he appear to be aware of the fact. His usual way was to lead off with little or no warning, sometimes out of silence, and always in that rather flat sort of monotone of his. And, whether he intended it or not, as he steadily went on with the tale, so the impressiveness increased, till at the end both I and two or three others, who were afterwards admitted to the hearings, always sat as I sat then—mute, undoubting, touched deeply by the uncanniness of the narrative. Thus I thought, and gazed into the dark ultra-marine, opalescence-like hue of night and water at the two-mile distant mouth of the harbour, across which, a few miles further away, another island stretched, towering up amongst the stars above, and forming a blackish background to an occasional steamer that throbbed through the warm, slumbrous silence, with its many lights like brilliant but jarring dots on Nature's beauty.

I had read "Frankenstein," "Faust," "The Devil on Two Sticks," Reynolds's "Were-wolf," Poe's "Tales of Mystery and Imagination," and other such things; yet none of them had touched me like to this. Possibly the reason was that our surroundings—on this particular occasion, at least—lent themselves to the heightening of that mystery and realism in which Shivers' recitals were always steeped. As to

himself, at these times he always sat still, with his curious grey eyes fixed on nothing in particular, and with all the evidence about him that he was away in the scene and the incidents of which he had just spoken. Perhaps another cause of our being so impressed by his stories was the light in which we generally looked on him—the sense of mystery and half-hidden power that he carried about with him, as other men carry their personalities; and, in addition, the manner of a man who was telling the simple truth.

Tired as I was with the “humping” of bags of coal, I spent much of the first half of that night in committing Shivers’ tale to my “Journal,” by which process it was memorized all the more indelibly. Curiously, in a way—yet not so when one looked really into the matter and the man—he made no approach to another such recital until we were half-way across the Indian Ocean. It might have been that he subsequently regretted the voluntary reminiscence, and drew his cloak of aloofness more closely around himself. He certainly appeared to me, for some weeks afterwards, to be less inclined to talk on any subject that I broached during our dog-watch chats. Another thing that was no doubt inducive to this ebb in the tide of our intimacy, his increase of reserve, naturally kept me at a further distance, metaphorically; and, although I was eager to have him open again the unwritten book of his suspected past—which every one of us fully believed to be well-stored with rare incidents—I could no more make that suggestion off-hand than I could

get around his effective fencing in my attempts to lead up to the subject of yarning.

To some extent this was all the more remarkable because, as we steamed away down south, and each one of us became better known to his fellows, the cook grew to be fairly familiar with Shivers—but without once getting any adequate return for his friendliness. Not that the bo'sun was short or silent with him—as he was towards others—or anything of the sort ; on the contrary he was always pleasant, and generally with no undue seriousness, at times with even a slight lightness of tone, yet ever with that impassable, nameless barrier, screen, or whatever it may be termed, up between them. Nor did it matter that the “ doctor ” was fond of yarning, and never heard one but that he was ready with another (albeit in the course of the voyage he told only one that was worth repeating). No tale, ill-told or well, ever drew one from Shivers on those occasions—not even though I several times tentatively tried to lead the way from the “ doctor's ” effort to that desired end, without hinting that the bo'sun could spin yarns as I had never heard them spun before. For to make me keep this knowledge to myself it had not required the old man's seemingly indifferent caution, when he and I left the fo'c'sle-head, after the story of the derelict, “ You need not tell this to the others.” Almost from the first I had felt instinctively that what he said to me in our evening conversations was for me alone, not that he ever entrusted me with anything that could not have been re-told freely. Truth to tell, his part of the talk was

generally made of questions and comments, little, manly homilies and bits of first-hand philosophy on what he drew from me as to my life at home, my running-away, time in the fishery, reading, ambitions, the comradeship that had held Shells and me together, and other such things.

But, not to weary the reader with too many words as to that curious intimacy between a strange old man and a, perhaps, unusual young one, I will turn to the cook's one printable story. We were throbbing away, in ballast, through a glassy sea, from Port Elizabeth to the Mauritius. It was in the second dog-watch. Shivers and I were out on deck, he listening to one of my boyish escapades at home, when along came the "doctor" from his galley, his dungaree trousers and cotton shirt—open to the last chest-button—clinging to him with perspiration. He was a short, big-boned man, with a broad, red face, and black beard and whiskers which he regularly kept in a state of stubble by clipping them. Where he hailed from originally I could not tell—Lincolnshire, I think; but he had been some years in American vessels, and his vernacular was pretty much as follows.

When he heard what I was talking about he soon interrupted with, in that deep-chested note of his, "Yarns? . . . I'll tell yu one. But it mustn't be a long 'un, 'cause I've got my cracker-hash * tu git under-way yet."

"All right, fire away," I replied, there being more

* Soaked ship's biscuits and minced salt pork, flavoured—sometimes—with an onion, seasoned, and baked.

familiarity between him and me than I ever felt free enough to feel regarding the bo'sun in those days.

In the course of repeated efforts to get his ship's tobacco well-alight he remarked, "'Tisn't a man's yarn, this—any more an' yourn; it's a boy's yarn An' though it was a sort o' scrapegrace thing, I kent say as I'm parti'lar 'shamed on it . . . seein' all there was in it."

"It wasn't one of your grand doings, then, 'doctor'?" I asked, throwing a glance at Shivers, who sat on a cork-fender, with his back against a coil of line, and those sphinx-like eyes of his quietly fastened on the cook's face.

"Well, no; an' 'twasn't just quite the thing as a lad should du, eether—least-a-wise, not w'en he's got his hide tu think of," was the answer, given during a reflective look at the box of *tandstickors* in his hand. "But yu see, mine had bin tanned till it was too tough fer a' odd w'ackin' tu make any sort o' difference. . . . Ah, them wasn't these times—they wasn't. A free hand an' a bit o' ratlin line didn't git you hauled afore the Board o' Trade then; an' a jolly sight better the lads was for it—an' I ses it w'o had me share."

"But I thought you were going to tell us a story," the bo'sun put it quietly, with the faintest suspicion of a smile playing around his grizzled mouth.

"Egh?" was the deep, hard, grunted query, in the uttering of which an old salt is the only real master. He was probably remembering other occasions when he had been just as gently hauled back to the point by the bo'sun, who never interrupted his

own yarns with outside remarks. "Well, 'twas just a lad's ingenooity—doesn't take much, yu know, w'en the tools is there an' he's willin'—dare say yu'd'a' done it, too. I was a 'prentice at the time—a bit of a w'ipper-snapper not much higher'n a tar-pot; an' my master—Cap'n Summers, Goole, that was his name; he owned the *Mary Frost*, three-masted schooner, as went ashore in the Wash five years ago—ay, only five years ago. Mean?" he spat on the deck, in contemptuous remembrance of the man to whom he had served his indentures. "He used to 'tice rats aboard tu catch 'em an' boil 'em—skin an' all—for ther' taller tu grease his sea-boots with. But his wife. . . . He wasn't a patch tu her, he wasn't. Skin a flint? Ay, she'd skin a flee fer its hide, if her fingers had bin sharp enough—an' they was sharp, too, they was. . . .

"Yu see, it was like this: ev'rything as us lads did wrong—an' wot was rite one day was wrong the next—was punished with no dinner, or no tea, as the case might be, w'en ashore—course, it was the usual bit o' line at sea. Well, we was home, givin' the schooner a clean-up an' bendin' winter sails. I was youngest 'prentice—three of us ther' was—an' she'd had her knife intu me all the time, five days it was—five 'ole days, b' the almanack. Well, it come Sat'rday night—black as the ace o' spades—an' cold? Worse than the Cattegat in a nor'-easter. Anyway, that didn't prevent the missus from puttin' me tu wash her kitchen floor, w'en I got home at dark—ay, an' afore I had any tea, six o'clock though it was b' the church clock as I went in; an' that was a

proper church clock, for it never sinned b' tellin' lies. . . ."

"So she made you wash the floor—did she?" said I, by way of giving him a fresh start.

"Made me? It don't want no makin' w'en a growin' lad's bin five hours at work on a sniff o' onion broth an' two suet dumplin's, an' his tea at the other end o' the job. . . . No, I just got at it; an' walked through that quick that she had me do it over agin—oh, she was a clean body, was the missus—clean as a fresh-scraped horse-radish, an' twice as nasty. Well I got back tu the door, my knees wet through an' like ice with kneelin' on the stone flags. W'ile I was duin' the doorstep, round 'twixt me an' the bucket swished Tiger, 'er dog. She had a poodle, she had, artful 's herself an' blacker'n the galley stove. Course, he'd bin up tu some mischief, 'cause rite on top of him comes a Irish terrier an' gives 'im a nip on the neck. Then over comes the bucket top o' them an' me; Tiger yells, gets away intu the house, an' t' other dog makes off. . . ."

"Then you were wet with the bucket capsizing?" I remarked.

"Wet? I was drippin'—drippin' like a soddened rat, I was; an' dirty, cold water at that. Of course, she came out the parlour, she did—came out like a home'ard-bounder 'fore a fresh breeze. Tiger's yell fetched her out; it would 'a fetched her from heaven, if anything would; but me, hungry an' shiverin'—she fetched me a slap on the ear that sent me spinnin'! Strike! She'd a hand like the tail of a grampus, an' w'en she brought it round, . . . it was like the wipe

of a spanker clue adrift in a breeze. . . . How dared I hit her dog, she said, an' such a dog as me, too. If she'd bin a truthful knowin' woman, she'd a knowed that I daren't, 'cause I daren't say my skin was me own then. Any'ow, her dog had yelled, got some water on him; I had a' empty bucket 'stead of a full one; I was the least—t'other 'prentices was gettin' big fello's then—an' somebody must pay for that howl. 'Twasn't any use sayin' I didn't do it; 'twas no manner o' use talkin' about another dog bein' i' the case. I'd *done* it, an' I *got* it—yer can hoist me b' the thumbs tu the fore-top if I didn't. . . .

“Fust, it was tu clean up the mess them dogs had made about the steps, then wash the floor agin w'ere Tiger had planted his paws. After that—w'ile the other two fello's was out enjoyin' theirselves—I'd tu strip in the outer kitchen, no fire, an' bath myself in a washtub o' cold water, then tu bed without supper—but not tu stop—oh, no. She thought that was too warm an' snug fer me: so down I had tu come, in me shirt and trousers, an' clean the knives an' forks fer Sunday, an' all the boots; the knives an' forks I'd tu rub up an' down in the garden, tu save bathbrick; then put me feet under the cold tap—soap, yer see, cost money—an' go tu bed again. . . .”

The bo'sun and I waited in silence.

“Any'ow, I slept, spite o' no supper—slept late, I did. 'Stead o' bein' up an' lightin' the fire an' gettin' the stock-fish ready for her cookin'. She had tu call me; but she paid me out, she did. Oh, yes—Mrs. Cap'n Summers never owed a bill o' that sort

long, an' n'body could say as she did. We, that is them, had a leg o' mutton fer dinner, an' a fine bit o' sheep it was, if the smell went fer anything. I al'ays thinks I can sniff it w'en I remembers that day. . . . I had putaters—spuds wi' ther' jackets on (she al'ays held that it was a sin tu peel 'em afore cookin', such a waste, yu see). Course, they gave me a bit o' cabbage an' a spoonful o' gravey; then I had a toothful o' rice puddin'—without eggs. Oh, she never wasted eggs on puddin's; she'd as soon ha' given us bread-an'-butter an' jam fer tea, she would. But it was the mutton as troubled me. Ther' was a nice bit left o' the knuckle-end o' the bone, quite a nice three pounds or so—course, that was meant for a hash-dinner next day. Oh, a joint never went in one day in the Summers' house. It made my mouth water w'en I went intu the pantry tu fetch out the things fer tea; but she was there. Besides, she al'ays made me keep a w'istlin' w'en that pantry-door was open. Though 'twas Sunday, she held 'twas better as I should sin b' w'istlin' than b' stuffin meself wi' stolen vitchels. Not that she kept the door locked 'twixt meals; it 'adn't a lock, an' 'twasn't in her heart tu buy one; no, 'stead o' that she just kept the hinges that rusty that a crack thief couldn't ha' opened the door without it creakin' enough tu set yur teeth on edge. . . .

“'Twas w'en we got tu church that the mutton troubled me worst. Fred an' Dick was big lads, an' chapel-go'rs, besides the'r parents lived handy. I was little, an' a long way from home, I was; so I al'ays went tu church with 'em, an' wasn't asked yes

or no. . . . That mutton troubled me so as I couldn't pay any 'eed tu the service. I got flurried, an' once or twice sat down w'en I oughtu stand up. She saw it, an' nipped my arm tu mind wot I was duin'. But the finish came w'en I made pra'er answers in the second lesson. She w'ispered if I'd got stomach-ache, an' looked blacker 'n a tar-pot. . . . Well, wot could I du with that mutton on me mind? I just nodded. 'Twasn't any use. She gave me two nips, 'stead o' one, an' both bigger 'n t'other. But she'd given me a' idea, an' course I packed on all sail. The pain ov her nips went intu a stomach-ache, an' I hugged me middle as if I'd got spasms. The cap'n looked across her an' asked wot ailed me. I said, an' he told me tu git off home. She w'ispered as I was tu drink some hot water an' sit still b' the fire till she came. Fire, she called it. I thought 'twas a spark with the life gone out; but 'twas more'n I dared du tu put coal on. . . .

“Any'ow, I just sat ther'. Me shins was stem up tu the bars, but they wasn't hot enough tu make me forget the mutton. See, I'd bin without meat since the Friday noon, then 'twas only the head of a rabbit as the missus's brother—a gamekeeper—had sent her. So yu can guess as how I was hungry. 'Twasn't wot she'd dun tu me way o' correction—'cause a lad must be corrected, w'ether he's rite or wrong; it keeps his mind on a straight course. No, 'twas sheer hunger—a full-sail breeze tu taste flesh.

“Well, course, such a feelin' 's bound tu be satisfied. Still, I don't think as I should ha' gone the racket,

if Tiger hadn't given me the hint. 'Twas him as squared my yards fer the job. He just came a-sneakin', as usual, out o' the parlour, an' went an' pushed his black snout inside the pantry door. Course, I got up tu see as he did no damage. He, the fool, thought he was in fer it, an' bolts rite in. Nat'rally, I goes in tu fetch him out; then I sees the mutton. . . . Well, a lad's only human, an' has a stomach, an' wants tu stuff it, w'ether it aches or not. . . . I looks at the mutton. Tiger, he looks at me, an' blest if he didn't have the cheek tu sit down an' fix his starboard eye slantwise on me.

"I just begins tu think as he'd bin set on tu keep watch on the mutton; but as he said nothin', I cut a mouthful—course I had me jack-knife on me. Then he, seein' me munchin', begins tu beg; an' I, tu keep him quiet, gave him a piece o' fat—'cause yu can't eat fat without bread, leastawise I never could. Well, 'twas ork'ard tu get at, up on that shelf ther'; so I walked it out on tu the table, Tiger waggin' his tail alongside, just as if he thought we was duin' rite—which he couldn't be duin,' 'cause he'd bin brought up so strict like.

"Bein' easy tu get at, I was soon outside a pound or so o' the juicy stuff—fact was, I came up flat-aback with a jerk, an' begins tu think I was in fer a piece o' line twice o' day an' no dinner fer a week; 'cause the missus, she al'ays measured the vitchels w'en she put 'em away. But Tiger—oh, he had his good points, Tiger had; but they had a nasty 'nack o' comin' out w'en yu didn't want 'em', cept on this occasion. He ups an' he gives me a hint agin.

W'ile I was a thinkin' o' the trouble tu come, an' a lookin' at the mutton, he ups with hisself on tu the table an' mittins the mutton, without a please or thank yu. 'Course I—I had me master's goods tu look after; no eldest 'prentice ther' tu du it—I fetches him one on the lug, so as he drops it. I makes a grab at it, an' down goes the dish, wollop. Tiger, he steers smart for the parlour, an' I looks at the wreck.

“Now, ses I, I'm fair in fer it. But trouble's a fine thing tu sharpen yur wits—anyway, it al'ays did mine, an' pretty sharp that time. In five minutes I'd 'nawed the w'ole face o' that mutton away. The pieces o' dish was planked on the pantry floor an' the bone in the middle ov em'. Tiger I w'ipped out o' that parlour like snuff—fust time I ever touched him without thinkin' he'd bite me—rubbed 'is feet in the gravey; then took him into the pantry, dropped him, an' chased him straight back tu the parlour. 'Course, I shifted the mess o' bits an' gravey, well as I could, tu the pantry, an' made it seem as if the job was all dun ther'—nothing tu be seen in the kitchen but Tiger's footmarks. Then I wipes the grease from me mouth, an' sits b' the fire, just as she'd said I was.

“'Course, I was ther' w'en they come back—huggin' me middle an' shiverin'. Ther' was trouble fer Tiger, that was certain: but Missus Cap'n Summers al'ays said as she thought I'd a hand in it, not that she didn't think Tiger had, all the same. If it hadn't bin for me stomach-ache,” he now giving the first faint smile since beginning his tale, “I'd ha' got fits that night. But the best was nex' day

w'en they gave me the mutton fer dinner, as they thought Tiger had 'nawed."

"And that's the tale of the mutton?" said I, laughingly.

"It is, sonny; an' yu kent beat it." And with a smile on his big face, he arose and walked aft quietly, leaving Shivers and me watching him away. A few minutes later one-bell was struck (the quarter to eight o'clock signal for the watch below to prepare to come on deck); and as the next look-out was mine, I went to make myself ready.

At Port Louis—which we reached late one afternoon—we were put into quarantine for two days. On the second evening the bo'sun and I sat—as usual, in harbour or at anchor in a roadstead—on the fo'c'sle head, talking, listening to the periodical blowing of a bugle on shore, and smoking continuously to keep away mosquitoes. I had just finished telling him of my first visit to the place, and of Shells and I going to the scene of "Paul and Virginia," when he said, quite in his ordinary way:

"So have I been here before, my lad—a few times. But it's the first that I remember best. Homeward-bound we were then from Colombo, with a holdful of green coffee-berries. Our port of destination and discharge was Havre. The barque, *Jane Seymour* of Hull, was small, but tight—tight as a drum, and quite a satisfactory packet to most of us. Yet she was growing in need of an over-hauling alow and aloft. We had been out tramping during twenty long months, after taking a load of that greasy Welsh coal to Iquique. Here and there on the round trip

we had dropped a hand, of course, and two had 'jumped' us. Now we were returning home, with only two of the original forward-crowd, and our south-of-Ireland second-mate. Of the remainder there were not two hailing from any one nation under the sun.

"The *Jane*, as we generally spoke of her aboard, crawled away from the Bay of Bengal, close-hauled to the south-west monsoon—the days lengthening out under a continual repairing of sails and running-gear. But in the matter of weariness they were to grow more, yet in a way less—deadly in mystery and expectation, unmonotonous, and increasing in terribleness because of the reason for it all remaining a profound secret, till we reached port here, and had the whole thing explained.

"It was the forenoon watch of our seventh day out, Pete—the elderly Hollander, whom we had picked up at Batavia, in place of a run-away nigger—was in the foretop, putting a long-splice into one of the upper clewlines. A hard-grained specimen of his sort was Pete, with skin like browny-red parchment and a constitution fit for an Arctic explorer, one would have thought; but, all the same for that, he was the first to go down under that peculiarly insinuating pestilence, which we had shipped unknowingly back there in Ceylon.

"Pete suddenly became dizzy. He dropped the line and marlin-spike, and grabbed at the topmast-rigging. If Olaf, a lively tall Swede, had not swung himself like a monkey from the lower-topsail foot-rope, where he was working, down into the top

in a moment, Pete would have tumbled to the deck.

“However, with the help of a whip we got him down, and when we saw his face the most of us muttered, involuntarily, ‘Yellow Jack!’ Not half of us had ever been shipmates with ‘Yellow Jack,’ or had seen him, for that matter. It was the yellow-green hue in Pete’s hard skin that had caused the mutterings. As for him, he was speechless. The ‘old man’—one of a class that is happily disappearing—swore that Pete had ‘cheated’ him by shipping with ‘the fever and ague on him.’ At the same time there was some sane policy in his remark. The truth was, he intended it to do away with the idea of ‘Yellow Jack’ being amongst us. He knew what a weakening effect that thought would have on the most of us, and he was far from being one to let a trouble run its racket when he could ‘put a sprag in its wheel.’ But his callous blustering, which he could easily have avoided, fell a long way short of the object at which it was aimed.

“At the end of the afternoon-watch Pete was still in his bunk, not a word having passed his lips.

“During the whole day and the first watch of that night there were many whisperings amongst us, significant looks, and half-expressions, all of which still left the matter in a greater muddle; yet they were powerfully eloquent of a suggestive something that lay beyond our mental grasp.

“Without uttering more than a few moans, Pete died at one-bell in the morning-watch. In the presence of his blanket-covered body, like so many

mutes in a strange, awesome wooden cave into which a little daylight only just managed to creep, we ate our breakfasts.

“ While the *Jane* lay with her main-topsails aback, at ten o'clock that morning; the Scottish steward tolling a funeral monotony on the big bell forward; Captain Beeson reading the sea burial service from a mouldy Prayer Book with one back; our bared heads bowed, under a weight of that deep though sudden reverence which death causes only on the high seas, and with vague but very certain forebodings in our hearts—in the midst of this, poor old Pete's remains were consigned to this snaky element with which so many thousands of us play a life-long, creepy kind of hide-and-seek.

“ Well, brightness generally returns after a funeral at sea. But it wasn't so with us. The further we left the first victim's body astern, the less did we seem to realize that death was no longer with us. This feeling of uncanny oppression grew, was noted by us, and probably became greater because of the recognition we gave it. It grew in spite of the 'old man's' clamorous efforts to dispel it. He soon noticed the gloom that marked us as a whole, and, naturally, he was in some apprehension lest it should be detrimental to the working of the barque. Besides, crude as he was, he knew the theory—if theory it be—as to predisposition in the matter of ills that flesh is heir to.

“ At any rate, three days went by in this manner. Early in the second watch of the fourth day—just after dinner it was—Stephani, a cross-eyed, limp-

footed, sour-tempered but excellent A.B. from Barcelona, fell back, helpless, just as Pete had done. When he fell he was sitting on the fore-hatch, darning a pair of socks. At the time most of us were grouped about between him and the topgallant-fore-castle door—not more than three fathoms from this new sufferer, towards whom no hand was stretched. At this—no one going to the Spaniard—you will not be surprised; you know what ‘windjammer’ sailors are. Besides, nobody had been able to do Pete a scrap of good. So there we stood, under the second dropping of that invisible pall, that had such an inexplicable oppression in it, as if it had been a pronouncement of doom on men who wanted to die.

“Yet a change came—not that we fought off the oppressiveness of the thing in any spirit of desperation or dogged hope. It was more as mechanical beings, moving in an ominous atmosphere, that we went to Stephani’s help. He, however, lacked the staying powers of his predecessor to the repelling inevitable. He died at sundown, and was buried at the midnight change of watches.

“Captain Beeson then began to lose some of his loud bullying. The gloom had touched even his blunt susceptibilities, and by the end of the next day he was well-nigh as deep in it as we were.

“That dread, subtle foe in our midst, whom every one had ceased to look on as ‘Yellow Jack,’ gave us very little time between its second and third victims. Just before six-bells on the afternoon of the day after Stephani was lowered over the side, the mate—a stalwart young Australian who had

joined us in Hobart Town—doubled up abruptly by the main-hatch, against which he had stumbled whilst looking aloft and giving an order. At first we thought he had received a blow on some vital part; but no such happy chance was for him—or for us.

“When we had turned him over and seen his face, the ghastly truth flashed on us that we were about to lose another of our cosmopolitan crew. On him there were all the signs and marks that had stamped his forerunners along that mysterious avenue of death—extreme physical lassitude, entire loss of speech, half-covered glazing eyes, a chilling, livid, greenishness in the flesh generally and the faintest of foam-streaks along the lips.

“To him, as he lay there, came the ‘old man’; who fell back, pallid and visibly shaking, the moment that his gaze alighted on the mate. But he had to be moved—common humanity and fellowship demanded that, fearful though we were to touch him, lest we should there and then be smitten with the plague, as we now considered this horrible malady to be. As we carried him away to his box of a berth, the general expectation was that we should have another funeral at sunrise. Such, however, was not the case. Gruesome death hung about the *Jane* during the next few days, but didn’t come aboard.

“As was afterwards explained to us, owing to the position of the mate’s berth, and to his robust constitution, he kept the end away longer than either Stephani or Pete had done. Then, in blind ignorance of what would happen, an unhappy change was made. During those few days we had been favoured by a

smart breeze. On the morning of the fifth day the wind lulled till it scarcely kept the sails full. By this time the mate had recovered some weak use of his tongue, and he moaned a request to be taken on deck, so that he could breathe more freely. Of course, his wish was obeyed. The 'old man,' who had got back a little of his lost spirits, superintended the moving. And for a few minutes he sat talking to the mate, after the latter had been placed on a mattress, under an improvized awning, leeward of the after-hatch, just where the fumes from the deadly foe below passed over and about him on their way to the leeside.

"He died in the middle of the first watch, that night.

"Then we drifted into calm weather, that helped the malady that was all too quickly unshipping our crew, and signing them on for a voyage whence there would be no signing-off.

"The next to go was the West Indian; he went on the day after the mate left us. But his going was different from those of the others; perhaps this was owing to difference in physical and temperamental conditions. He succumbed in the midst of a weak spasmodic raving.

"After burying him, the working of the barque was all done in a listless, mechanical fashion, in which the 'old man' took an almost mute share. From the black cabin-boy to himself there was not amongst us a heart that wasn't crushed to the uttermost. Every man expected that he would be the next to go, and comported himself according to that ex-

pectation and to his individual temperament and outlook—most of which were a long way from what they ought to have been.

“Gloom impenetrable hung about the *Jane Seymour*. The calm was varied by light winds from various points of the compass; but they made no difference to our misery. It soon came that we cared not whether we ate or starved, worked or died. I am sure that the cook and two, if not three, of the A.B.s looked on everything they did as wasted time and energy. As they would probably be dead on the morrow, or maybe before midnight, what was the use of doing anything, they said many a time. The sails were no more than half-trimmed. The helmsman steered wide of his given course, nor heard so much as a single growl that he paid no better heed to his duty. Of other work, none was done.

“During the following week we lost three more hands—the steward, who of all men had worked the hardest to keep up our spirits, especially when there was any sail-work to do; then a half-caste Portuguese A.B., a fatalist, if anything; and finally our German ordinary seaman.

“Now there were but five of us to work the barque—each one lying down to sleep whenever he wished, providing it was not his turn at the wheel, and never expecting to rise again unaided; every one silently wondering whose would be the next turn, and not one of us seeming to care a jot whether he buried his fellows or was left to be the last—left to the unspeakable horror of rotting away on the deck of a sea-worthy derelict. Providentially nearly all this

chance sleeping was done on the gallant-forecastle-head or on the poop. The forecastle and the cabin, except at meal-times, were as good as deserted.

“Then another dropped—a scar-marked, blasphemous Philadelphian he was; one who moaned out a curse at an attempt to move him to the forecastle. He fell within a fathom of the weather-bow, close to the inner end of the cathead, and was left there—a fact to which he owed his life. For on the following morning (the most blessed sunrise of all on that awful passage) we made Port Louis, flying the Red Ensign, jack downwards, at our spanker-gaff. This, of course, soon brought off a tugboat, and help that put the barque riding comfortable at her anchor, not a cable’s length from where we are now.

“In the tug came the port doctor, who was puzzled awhile at the ‘plague’ we carried. But he presently asked no more questions, made no further examinations. On hearing the brief complete story of how the mate had fallen, slightly recovered, been brought on deck, then died, he said, ‘What is your cargo?’ And he had hardly been told, ‘Green coffee-berries,’ when he ordered sharply, ‘Off hatches, and stand clear!—every man on to the forecastle-head as fast as he can get when the hatches are off!’

“As we lay at anchor, forward was the weather-part of the vessel, and was therefore the furthest away from those death-emitting mouths—the hatchways—of the plague-spot below. His commands were quickly obeyed by those who had come aboard from the tug, and up from the sweating berries came the

thick poisonous fumes which were carried away astern by the gentle breeze; meanwhile we were grouped on the forecastle-head, those of us who needed the doctor's ministrations being at once attended to.

“Well, of course, we had to spend quite a little while here. The barque herself was put in quarantine; then her load had to be taken out and dried, and that was a long piece of work and a costly one. But, as there was nothing contagious in what we were all, more or less, suffering from, we were taken ashore, and shipped again, with fresh hands, when the time came.”



CHAPTER VIII

In Port Louis again : Remembrances : A low-caste babel :
Trouble brewing : Sinuous beauty : Cut and guard : A
dastard's act : Hades in riot : Love and death : Skipper
"Queers" : Rude treatment : The meanness of "Queers" :
Banana Marie's revenge : A lost propeller : Fast aground :
I ship again : Homeward bound : My shipmates : "Nippit" :
A broken topmast : Mohammedan diplomacy : "Nippit's"
trick : Fleeing seamen : The trickster bagged.

FOR what particular reason I could not say exactly ; but I did not fail to note, when putting the story into my " Journal " later on, that, with the exception of odd touches here and there, Shivers had not made his second recital nearly so impresisve as the first one was. Perhaps the restraint was due to some half-formed decision, subsequent to and in a way because of his telling me the tragedy of the derelict, not to rake up more things from his past. It may also have been that he had noticed how impressed I was by the first story, surmised that I should commit it, and all its kind, to paper, and had made up his mind to tell whatever other stories he told in an ordinary way—for obvious reasons. And, at the same time, likely enough while unable to resist the desire to relate this experience, he was wishing that he had not done so. Be that as it may, however, I afterwards ascertained that what he said of the action of the fumes from the sweating green berries was all and entirely in keeping with scientific facts.

On the Saturday evening each man drew the customary five or ten rupees—the officers and engineers drawing more, of course—and went ashore. My watch-mates—a young, good-natured, but blundering and thick-set north countryman, and a tall, quiet, intelligent Dane—were my companions. Not one of us was “in for trouble,” so that we took an easy stroll about the town and returned on board—I thinking, as we were rowed down the long, narrow harbour, in slumbrous, moonlit warmth, of that wild fight in the tea-house on my left; of the grey-haired Creole and his fiddle in the inn just behind; of poor Shells, his care of me, the glamour I then felt at being in the East, and of other features connected with my former visit to the place. On the Sunday evening—after a luxurious tea of fresh bread, bananas, eggs and butter which we had bought on the previous night, as is quite common amongst young sailors—the Dane and I went ashore again, and by-and-bye we found our way into “The Bumboat,” a sing-song and liquor-shop, a little off the main street and near the opera-house. The room was a biggish one, square, with a low ceiling, lit by a large swinging lamp in the middle, and filled with more or less bad specimens of the merchant-service of nearly every nation on earth and sprinkled with male and female natives of the island. As a matter of course, the atmosphere was a fog of tobacco-smoke, the fumes of “kill-me-quick” drinks and human breath, through which the rays of the lamp shone dimly on the heterogeneous, parti-coloured crowd, from whom there came a babel of tongues and such unceasing oaths

as might have made the devil himself turn pale had he been there in person. It was, briefly and indeed, the worst scene of its kind that I ever put my head into. From the very first we were for leaving it immediately ; but, as "The Bumboat" was on every sailor's tongue as *the* place to see, we decided to stay awhile. When my eyes had become accustomed to the place, I noticed several men who were from vessels that lay near the *Ethelburga*, one, in particular, being the handsome second-mate of a South Sea whaler. Presently I heard him say above the din, for the Dane and I sat close to his party :

"Here, beauty, fill these glasses again."

The fat middle-aged negress to whom he had spoken lumbered up, gave him a leer, and asked, "All ob dem, sonny ?"

"All ? Yes, you over-grown lump of Spanish rock ! I guess we don't drink two out of a glass—as Kaffirs eat mush from a kid. What say you, mates ?" he added, to the third officer and two engineers of an English steam "tramp," that had anchored abreast the whaler on the previous day, and with whom he had formed one of those fleeting acquaintances so common to the seaman. They laughingly replied in the negative. She took the glasses and her oily presence to the bar.

The Boston man removed his short, contemplative gaze from the pathetic face of a young mulatto beauty, squatting on an empty gin-case to his right, and fixed it on a Naval Reserve-man and a Welsh Fusilier, who were playing with single-sticks in the centre of the big room. The soldier—

far less trained to the weapon than his opponent—received a smart blow on the muscle of his sword-arm. Laughingly, yet with a wince, he dropped the improvized stick, said he had learnt enough, and returned to his companions.

“Here—guess I’ll have a rap in there, boss,” the young whaler said, and sprang from his seat. Before he could reach the weapon it was in the hand of a tall, lithe, fire-eyed half-caste, who came like a dart from the other side of the room, instantly put himself into position, and invited the Britisher to play with him. The latter came to the guard; play went on until the native beat down his stick by sheer force, and dropped two rather heavy blows upon his peaked cap. At this there were some murmurs of disapproval, accompanied with much louder applause from the victor’s partisans. Greater trouble threatened. The Dutch landlord and his half-caste wife loudly called for order.

The whaleman again leaped to his feet, face towards the silent but defiant champion of the three previous nights—according to what we afterwards heard. As he stepped off, the mulatto rose like a mute, sinuous apparition of dark-hued grace, made to twine her arms about his neck, paused, and said in a half-whisper, “You no fight him.”

“Fight? No, you little softy, it’s only play,” was his answer, as he gave a smiling look into her great, swimming eyes.

“But him bad debil. Him burn—no play.” Her soft arms slid up; the light, gauzy sleeves slipped down and showed two limbs of a really fine mould.

She crossed her wrists behind his neck. Her warm enervating breath played on his face. She returned his smile; but the subtle pleading of her soul was in it, and she began to speak in low sibilant tones.

"What for you no let him come?" cried the waiting, panther-looking native, from under the lamp, ten or twelve feet away.

"'Cause I ask him give me drink first," she nonchalantly replied, and swung a deceiving careless glance at her questioner.

"Do you want a drink?" the American asked, thrusting one hand inside the back of her loose robe, and patting her smooth shoulder-blade.

"No, no!" she whispered. "I want you no play with him. He tiger; he—he——"

"Oh, the devil! Here, give her some iced squash, boys," and swinging half-round, he took her by the upper part of her arms, dropped her on the English officer's lap, sprang to the middle of the room, and before she could regain her feet he was engaging his eager, yet, at present, wary opponent.

The whaling barque was doing a little refitting, and had been in the harbour some twelve days, during which her second-mate had become well-known in "The Bumboat," and had several times "treated" the girl who now—almost wholly unobserved, for all eyes were intent on the two players—crept stage by stage closer to him. The white man had jocularly boasted of his fencing powers, and had been overheard by the half-caste. It was the latter who had originally and nightly introduced the sticks, and had, to all appearances, steadily and

covertly sought his present opportunity. It was said that he had twice threatened the girl for her favours to the stranger, upbraided her with similar past kindnesses to him, and had called her a *fille de joie*—which was untrue in the sense meant by him. Once he had come near picking a direct quarrel with the man himself; but the latter had, with the good-natured American's usual spice of contempt for a coloured skin, laughed him about his business.

Now it was a matter of cut and guard, guard and cut, with sometimes a feint, then a stick got home, and now a miss. No pointing above the breast had been decided on from the first, because of that being too dangerous to the eyes, owing to their having no helmets; and a petty officer from H.M.S. *Hawk* stood forward to record the points made and see fair play. Both men were evidently well-accustomed to the stick, and the play soon assumed a steady, steely, scientific aspect. In this the white was the better man, for it was his nature to take matters easily. The other presently lost patience and began to batter, thinking to break down his antagonist's guard also. But here he found far more staying powers. He did once, however, contrive to deliver a sweeping blow at the whaleman's right shoulder, though it did not reach home, and so directly cause the further trouble aimed at.

Instead of hitting the man, the stick had alighted on the girl's hand. Their movements had brought her at that instant immediately behind the American. Her eyes were fixed on those of her countryman. She had seen what was then coming, leaped forward,

and received the blow on her outstretched palm. Like a flash of hate the striker sprung ahead, and brought his stick down on the fleshy part of her arm. She gave a faint cry of pain as her left hand flew to the injured spot. A few of the spectators stood up, while those who had been inattentive began to ask what was the matter. The whaleman spun half-round, divined the situation, clapped the stick into his other hand, and planted on the half-caste's jaw a blow that sent him headlong to the stone floor.

In a moment there was not a sitter in the place. Heads and shoulders came poking in at doorways from adjacent small rooms, and from the heavy sultry night without. The air was a babel of languages. Black, brown and white faces strained their eyes at the little centre group under the big swinging lamp. Low-uttered menaces came from several quarters; knives flashed partly out of their sheaths, some, rather from instinct than definite purpose, appearing completely. Experience and feeling probably told the American that he was in for something serious, and he again changed hands with his stick, as the mulatto leaped to his feet.

Without a word of warning, the latter shattered the lamp with his stick, and put the place in darkness, except for two dim shafts of light that came from other rooms. Then (as we afterwards found out) he dropped the stick, produced a previously hidden, fine, long blade and turned to where his opponent stood. That instant he felt two lithe hands encircling his neck, two sets of finger-ends so thrusting in his windpipe that his eyes nearly shot

from his head—as though the pipe were a flat steel spring, the eyes loose balls at the end of it, and her fingers the striking power. At the same moment two thumbs stuck into the back of his neck. His brain was probably as dark as the room for a moment. The knife dropped from his hand, as he and she went backwards across one of the shafts of light. He was twisted half-round, given a vigorous shove, and sent headlong into the midst of a crowd of friends and foes. Who it was that fell among them they knew not, and the next instant he was literally under their feet.

Of course, the girl did this; her quick thoughts at their wildest, we may be sure. I saw her cross the light again, with a leap and a crush to the whaleman's side, his arm in her convulsive clutch. She was whispering in his ear to get out of it, and dragging him door-wards. From outside came the whirr of both civil and military policemen's rattles, the stampede of hurried feet, and the sound of several tongues excitedly asking for information on the hubbub. Within was but a mad confusion—oaths of men, screams of women, groans, blows, a smothering atmosphere, and the breaking of glass and other ware. Then a couple of lights appeared. The police crowded in—a sergeant with a naked sword in his hand. The uproar subsided. The half-caste, furtively regaining his knife as he arose, struggled to his feet, bleeding from a gash in his cheek, his clothing torn, and murder in his eyes. Those near him fell away, because of the presence of the police. He darted a look around the room. The two whom he evidently

sought were missing, and he sprang through the nearest doorway. It happened to be one leading into the garden. He knew every inch of the premises, wanted to reach the street—for he surmised that she would persuade the white man down to his ship, out of the *mêlée*—and he dashed along the path by the house.

At the corner he violently collided with two persons standing quite close to each other, almost knocked them down, and sent himself backwards. A little cry, half-fright and half-surprise, told him he had no need to search further. Maddened with rage and jealousy, he leaped at the man. The knife flashed in the pale light of that sinking, tropic moon, and went downwards just under the girl's left collar-bone. The lightning thought to save, and a quick step, had brought her in a line with the blow, and she silently dropped dead between them. The long narrow blade had entered her heart.

During the next few seconds surprise held the two men speechless. Then the white one's fist again, and, with terrific force, found the other's face, and he went back like a log. Now lights and two crowds appeared—one from the rear and one around the front and end of the house. Before the American could follow up his intention of more severely handling the half-caste and seeing to the girl, the police pressed in, and the truth was known at once.

Because of the whaleman's participation in the affair, and the fact that his ship was about ready to sail, there was a magisterial inquiry on the following day, from the newspaper report of which and from the American himself I gleaned such of the foregone

as did not happen within my sight and hearing. But whether the half-caste was sent to the penal settlement on the opposite side of the island, or to the Andaman Isles, or was eventually tried for murder and found guilty (which was possible, according to what was said about the harbour), I cannot tell, because we sailed before the real trial came on. But before we left Port Louis we were treated to one of the best little comedies that I ever saw enacted off a stage. Late on the Tuesday after the affair at “The Bum-boat” a small, Tyne-side barque came into the harbour and moored almost alongside the *Ethelburga*, and it was in connexion with her skipper that the fun occurred. We had ceased work for the day, and Shivers, the Dane, two or three others and I were on our fo’c’sle-head—as high as we could get, short of the rigging, for the sake of the evening breeze—smoking and watching the barque’s crew finish their duties.

The skipper was small, square-built and middle-aged, with a twang that was a curiously spiced mixture of Cockney and north-country burr and intonation. The hair about his narrow, little face straggled like very fine wires, pale-ginger in colour, over the surface of mottled soap. His eyes were of a light-grey, small, rather crossed in their vision, and rimmed by what appeared to be ophthalmic lids. Amongst themselves his forward hands never spoke of him but as “Sore-eyed Queers.” In reality he had no more sores than they had. What gave his eyes this unprepossessing appearance was a number of tiny coloured warts, the presence of which was

quite native to their owner. But without a doubt there was another reason for the name of "Queers," for he had his ways, especially with bumboat-men and women—as we very soon saw, and against all and several of whom he appeared to nurse an enmity that was as strong as his own personality. Why? That no one but he knew. A long series of successful, despotic, often dishonest dealings with his enemy had probably so dulled natural caution—where the enemy were concerned—that when he met "Banana" Marie—the old mulatto bumboat-woman of Port Louis—he was, in a sense, practically disarmed. Some of his men told us that he was new to East Indian ports; but, all the same, he "allowed" that he was "going to teach the Coolies a trick or two."

However, just as the work was concluded Marie dropped alongside and climbed aboard, in the waist.

"Now, Jane, what do you waant?" he asked loudly, looking two ways at once at her, as she tumbled her fat figure lightly over the rail; and we, knowing her and having already sized him up, looked instinctively for fun.

"Ah, sare—marsa Cap'n," replied she, a big smirk covering her broad, brown face, "I'se no Sjane. I'se Marie—*Banana Marie*. I sell banana sheap—banana, mango, coral, shutney—mango-shutney ——"

"I doan't care a ropeyarn what you sell, an' I ain't goin' tu, eether!" said he, interrupting the list of her wares. "But I care for this—you're a thief same as the rest o' your darned tribe; so get off-board my ship! An' be smart about it, or hang me if I doan't have you dropped over the side!"

Marie began to expostulate. She was unaccustomed to such treatment. "Oh, sare, me tief? You speak me no kind, sare! Me not rob no man—me gibee, not rob. You comey see."

Smiling, despite the situation, she turned towards her boat, motioning him to follow. And he went. Why he did so, for the very life of him he probably could not have told. And many another "hard-case" had done the same with Marie—or, rather, she with them; for Marie, too, had "a way with her"—a curious, soft, wheedling way that came without effort and did not consist of much verbal persuasion. Over the rail she now leaned, energetically pointing to the different commodities in her craft, vivaciously mentioning the price of each one, and asking him if he thought them dear. This question stirred up the original "Queers," putting down the newly risen one.

"Ay," said he, knowing in his heart that he lied; "I allow as they are dear—mighty dear—every blaamed thing as you carry! So clear off my ship, I tell you! An' if you come 'ere a-temptin' my men wi' yo'r 'square face' (gin) to give you paint an' stores, hang me if I doan't drop you, myself, into the 'arbour!"

With that he turned from the rail and Marie, who, to conciliate him, had offered her wares at half their cost—to him only, expecting to make her profit out of the men and the cook, if she were successful with the skipper. But it was to no purpose. She had to leave the barque there and then. "Queers" had turned his back on her—got her eyes off his, and he

took care to keep them off, until Marie was down in her boat again.

At noon on the following day—in a blue, scorching heat that stood still and well-nigh blinded one, for lack of wind to stir it—down to the boat-landing stage at the harbour-head came Skipper “Queers,” steaming and puffing like an asthmatical mule on a mountain-side, and seeming to melt in the glare of that tropic sun. (Our second mate, the Dane and I were there, waiting to row the captain aboard.) “Queers” was too mean to pay a rupee for a ghorry to bring him down. Marie also was there. He was about to hire one of the usual plying boats (his own gig having been stove-in during a recent hurricane) to take him and his purchases on board, for behind him trudged a Hindu porter loaded with fruit, &c.

Marie—rightly judging that his meanness would make him accept—offered to row him aboard in her boat. He hesitated, very slightly. She gave a homely rendering of “do as ye would be done by.” He took the proffered free “lift.” A few words in Creole, from Marie to those around, and the boat was instantly emptied of her possessions. She stepped in and pushed off, “Queers” and his marketings in her stern-sheets—he wondering probably whether the woman was wholly a fool, or if his curious, nerveless embarrassment was the result of his morning’s work in the heat on shore.

As she rowed leisurely along the middle of the narrow harbour, her nimble naked toes, unseen by him, were at work on the up-standing boat-plug. This presently left its hole, causing a large and rapid

inrush of water, at which Marie pretended to take great fright. Up she leapt, in a manner that made the light boat sway heavily to port. A quick hurling of her bulky proportions to starboard, and down went that side of the shallow craft, she with it, still clinging to the gunwale. Within a moment the boat was capsized, Marie swimming around it, her late companions on the landing stage gesticulating in all the fervour of French and African blood. Skipper "Queers" was hauled into a boat that had followed them—for this purpose; but his belongings were lying at the bottom of the harbour.

On the neighbouring vessels there was some shouting and excitement, which died away as Marie's craft was towed by the other boat to the beach; she placidly paddling her way along at its side, bemoaning the mishap with every other breath she took into her capacious lungs. Aft sat "Queers" in suggestive silence, his dripping clothes about him like a hot bath.

When her boat was put right she persisted in her purpose of rowing him aboard; which she did, the owner of the other craft having urgent business on a brig just below. "Queers" appeared to have no suspicion that a trick had been played on him—that the whole affair had been hurriedly planned between Marie and her friends, when he came in sight some three hundred yards from the harbour-head. For that reason he let her row him down to the barque, which happened, of course, without further trouble—she declaring her sorrow all the way, he no doubt cursing her out of existence in secret and wishing

to do so in fact and aloud. Policy kept him quiet, however ; and for her " kindness " he could not deny her the favour of trading with his men and cook.

Of course, we were no sooner aboard our " tramp " than we contrived to let the forward hands of the barque know what we had witnessed, much to their delight, as it was to us for days afterwards.

Two days later we left Port Louis—apparently the last time for me—with sugar for Calcutta, and enjoyed fair weather until we were well up the Bay of Bengal, when the wind freshened and was soon blowing half a gale. This would not have mattered much, for the *Ethelburga* was a good sea-craft ; but as we neared the mouth of the Hoogli our propeller dropped off, early one morning, and for six hours we did our utmost to get steerage way on her by the use of what sails she had and extra ones improvized out of spare tarpaulins. Then a Clan Line boat came along and took us in tow, after considerable difficulty in getting a hawser aboard—during which I could not avoid thinking how much more quickly a party of North Sea fishermen would have done the same work. Hardly had we entered the river, when the towline broke, and before we could be picked up again or drop an anchor, the *Ethelburga* was aground—with no particular danger to us.

Not to dwell on what happened then, after two days of fruitless efforts to tow her off, the forward hands were taken up to Calcutta and discharged. There we separated, each man shifting for himself according to his needs or notions—items in the ever-changing kaleidoscope of seafaring life, most likely

never to meet again. Unlike Shivers, who preferred to wait, awhile at least, for another boatswain's berth, I was soon away again, in the *Henry Martin*, a well-found brig, bound for London—sorry to part from him and thinking that, in the usual course of things, I had seen the last of him. But I was wrong in that particular.

As the brig was towed down to sea, I noticed that the *Ethelburga* was being emptied of her sugar, into lighters. From what I learnt subsequently she was floated again, repaired, loaded, carried a cargo to Havre, and was in Cardiff long before the *Henry Martin* dropped her anchor in the Thames. When once at sea, and things are settled down “ship-shape and Bristol fashion,” a man soon discovers into what kind of craft he has shipped. Comfortable the brig was certainly—a sort of homely packet, where the only disturbing factor was a “Liverpool-New Yorker,” a so-called able seaman who had also joined in Calcutta. But enough of him for the present—there is more to come. All hands, except he, the cook and I, had made the round voyage in the brig—from home to the Gulf of Mexico, then to Java, and so to Calcutta, and a very pleasant set of shipmates they were. Beyond Bully Benson—as we soon nicknamed the would-be American—and the master, there was not an oddity in the crew. As for the latter—well, he may be alive still, and there is such a process as the law of libel. Not that he appeared to have an ounce of real harm in him, so far as we were concerned—meanness excepted. Barring this trait, his all-governing characteristic, he was more fatherly than

otherwise, till the mate committed a great indiscretion by way of a practical joke.

Physically you would easily know him again, though you saw him but once in a crowd. His ordinarily slow-moving eyes, quick in their side-glances when not expected, had a certain magnetism that drew one's thoughts from more remote things, and made you feel that some curious influence was being levelled on you—a something that caused you to turn and see: What? Just a man of common though rather wiry build, having a weather-battered face with a straggling, greyish, ginger beard and two peculiarly brown-spotted grey eyes. At the first look he seemed nothing more than a moderately distinctive letter in Nature's alphabet of humanity; but he grew on one, apart from the fact that he was a born curser, with a wealth of expletives that was wonderful.

He really had some claim to the usual appellation of "old man," yet "old" in its full sense he was not. In years solely, I don't think he was more than forty-five. His oldness came of natural proclivities rarely kept out of school; that was the reason of his growing on those with whom he mingled. Until the veneer had been chipped off the exchange table of acquaintanceship, you would never have dreamt of his stock of dry humour, though instinct generally led his detractors to put him down as a quiet, grim "hard-case." Then, again, when you knew him, and remembered the bearings of his case, you did not wonder concerning him, in the least. And that was part of the peculiarity of the matter. You just

thought of him as one of the by-way inevitabilities of life.

When a man has spent twenty-eight years 'twixt sky and water, and but fifteen or sixteen in mingling with his more acute trading fellows on shore, it may be safely assumed that he has missed the most of those opportunities which make men either philosophers of the gentle school or clever knaves—or proves them, by their failing to learn the lessons offered, to be what Carlyle said the most of Londoners were.

But our “old man” was a curious sort of half-way fellow. You would never think of writing him down an ass; and not till knowing him better would you say to him (as Shylock to Portia), “How much older art thou than thy looks?” When one did know him this question was ever rising to one’s lips, despite the fact that his rather small and usually sleepy-looking eyes and spanker-gaff-like nose were a cruel facial lie on his wisdom; still, not so cruel, either, when one looked further into the matter. For it is quite safe to suppose that those seeming indications of a mind none too smart led many persons into getting a bad bargain at the hands of one whom they fondly took to be an instance of seafaring simplicity. As witness:

Before we were far down the Bay we fell in with some squally weather that kept us beating about for a week, during which we lost our fore-topmast, in part as a result of the second mate’s temporary negligence. As an evidence of the “old man’s” fatherliness (he was spoken of secretly by the hands as “Nippit”), he complained but little to the officer

except on the score of "cost"—whatever anyone did that should not have been done it was "the cost of the thing," and if there was no cost in the matter, then nothing was said. However, as the bad weather was all against us, and Madras not far away, Nippit ran us in there, to repair the damage in some degree of comfort and wait for a fair wind to start us afresh on the homeward passage—we had started badly, he said, and if we didn't hold up and begin again properly we should have had luck all the way home. To this extent his superstition went. I should have mentioned that the brig was a "Cousin Yacker" (Cornish), and that Nippit hailed from St. Ives. Soon after the sails were stowed and the decks cleared up—in the evening it was, an hour or so before the short twilight—a native came aboard with fruit and vegetables. When he swung himself over the rail Nippit was below. The native, being no "galoot," went forward to interview the cook, in an incidental manner, on the state of our greengrocery store, before fixing a price on his commodities. Several of us were idling close by, and heard something like this:

"Hallo, you 'doctor'!—How you are?" The fruiterer thrust his head into the galley, as the cook was preparing for the morning's hash. "Plenty bad potatoes you got dere. Here, hab a orange." He opened a little bag of juicy bribes and held it towards the cook. The latter rose to the occasion, saying he "didn't mind if he did, for it was so-so hot in that 'fernal caboose." "Oh, take two—take t'ree—four," the diplomatic vendor persuaded, and

not in vain. Then, in a roundabout leisurely fashion that occupied some ten minutes, he succeeded in unsuspectingly extracting the information he wanted.

In the meantime, Nippit had quietly issued from his cabin, seen the native leaning half-in at the galley-doorway, also the boat alongside with its contents and the care-taking youngster dozing in the bows, and had guessed the object of the Mohammedan's errand. They met a few minutes later on the after-deck. A "parley" ensued, and the prospective salesman was told to "dump the un-Christian stuff on deck" for examination. It was accordingly landed by the booby hatchway, two of us going aft to haul it up, and quite ready for the fun we expected.

When the seller fixed his exorbitant price, dictated by our having left Calcutta very short of such necessities, "Nippit" said "stuff an' ropeyarns." The other instanced his long pull from the shore, and invented great fictions as to the supply of such produce in and around Madras. Nippit derided the goods with an old-time British seaman's disregard for the niceties of expression. The other praised them, lending the warmth of an Eastern imagination to his lack of good English.

At length a price, twice the value of the articles, was agreed to. Then the skipper seemed to repent of the expenditure. He told the native to "go for'ard an' ask the cook what greens he wanted," himself turning to his cabin for the money. In an instant he was back at the hatchway, and had whispered to the other A.B.: "Go an' keep that

thievin' son of a gun for'ard there till I shouts you aft."

The man went, managed to convey his message secretly to the cook, and between them they kept the native there. In the interval the two sacks of vegetables were bundled below, and very speedily again lay on deck—both of them being almost full of frayed pieces of rope and worn-out canvas "shakings" which were barely worth carrying home and no other master would have had on board. But this stuff was hidden at the top of the sacks by a thin covering of the original contents.

A yelled query went forward. The native and our cook came aft, the latter almost moaning his impoverished state in the matter of "greens."

However, Nippit knew better—there were "enough an' to spare for any blessed cook afloat but a waster; an' he was not goin' to give two or three rupees a stone for vegetables for a lot of tarpots and galoots to stuff themselves on—not he. No: but he would give three rupees for the three biggest baskets of fruit." He got them, and told the seller to "tumble over the side smart like," when the vegetables were being offered at a quickly cheapening rate.

In a couple of minutes more the brig was rid of that Mohammedan's presence, he rowing shoreward, thinking how lucky he was to get as much for his fruit as the whole stock was really worth. On the following morning, the native came again; but he was not allowed on board—he remained long, and long again next day, with the same result. He hung

around in his big dug-out when we got under-way again, throwing choice Mohammedan maledictions at us, a tenth of which would have aroused Nippit's active superstitions, regarding the passage to come, if they had been uttered by a Christian. But when the mate—a most excellent officer and a man—drew his attention to a few of the curses, he tried to impress the mate with the necessity of giving a lesson in (Prussian) morality whenever the occasion offered, “specially to them thievin', coloured dogs.”

To go back to a few matters which I learnt from the brig's older hands, all the world and his wife knew that at that time the Mexican dollar was never worth more than three shillings and ninepence. Yet the fact had no influence on Nippit when he made every man, except the mates, sign a note-of-hand to pay him four shillings and twopence for each dollar drawn whilst they were at Vera Cruz. As some men will after a long passage, two of them had fairly run the gamut with their first Saturday night's advance, and did not return aboard till late on the Monday. The result was a lengthy and severe lecture on the error of their ways, with the remainder of the crew mustered aft to hear the homily. For on the mistakes of others Nippit was an excellent preacher, and a general publicist, too. Then, for the final head of the sermon, the two delinquents were privately summoned into the cabin. There he said that instead of “logging” and fining them two pounds apiece for drunkenness and desertion, he would let them off with half the amount and no “logging,” if they each signed another note for six dollars at the previous

rate—and took only two apiece. They were not foolish enough to put weight on the ropes about their necks, hence Nippit scored again.

On the following Saturday-night several of the men drew an additional three dollars, returned aboard in the small hours of the morning, with some Mexicans, and made the brig a pandemonium of drunken brawling till daylight. After breakfast all hands were summoned aft, and Nippit proved himself about the most choice of preaching navigators who ever trod a deck.

This time the punishment consisted of every man having to sign three dollars over to him, and to work all that day at repairing rigging, sails, and cleaning paint-work—he walking around the while, talking of the immorality of sailormen when off-board with money in their pockets, and of how much better it was for their health to be honestly working for their owners, than breaking the Sabbath by “half killin’ their so-so selves in them pigstys ashore there.”

Then came fortune’s cut unkind. The brig was loaded for the East. It was the eve before her intended early morning sailing. Nippit was on shore, where he had spent almost the whole of the past week. In compliance with his order, at ten o’clock the boat was at the quay-steps to receive him. And there he soon arrived; but not alone. With him was what, in the bright moonlight, seemed to be all a young Mexican beauty.

He talked her quite to the edge of the boat; then he suddenly endeavoured to put her into it, gruffly and excitedly whispering to the men to help him,

he the while trying his best to stifle her cries. But the Señora was too strong and illusive for him. Whilst the men were scrambling out of the boat, half-intending to obey Nippit's orders, yet fearful of doing so, she got away from him and tore back along the way they had come.

In an instant Nippit was into the boat, shoving her off, and gasping, "Give way, men!—give way!—For the love of God, out oars an' pull!" And the men did pull, much harder than he was worth; and what a hullabaloo there was on the quayside while they were pulling for the brig. To tell the truth, Nippit, in a moment of what appeared to be silly infatuation, had tried to abduct his agent's wife, whilst the agent and a friend were lingering along behind them; and the turmoil on the quay was being made by the two men, the wife, a couple of *alguaciles* and a few chance passers-by.

If it had not been for his fear of getting the brig on to that nasty reef at the mouth of the harbour, Nippit would have slipped his cable and stolen away that night; but for the life of him he dared not move without a pilot.

On the following day he was glad to be let off with a fine of three hundred dollars; and if he ever felt a touch of gratitude in the whole of his life it must have been to the British consul there, who managed the whole matter so that Nippit did not have to go ashore; for if he had once put his foot on the quay, the chances are that he would have been shot.

CHAPTER IX

Nippit's contradictions : Cowing a bully : Christmas-Eve in the doldrums : A practical joke : Misunderstandings : Fighting on the poop : Peace by a ruse : Nippit's great change : A fat, black naiad : Exchanging pleasantries : Bartering for fruit, &c. : " Pickled " rum : Tasting temptation : Paint for " fire-water " : Drinking in secret : A small revenge on Nippit.

HOWEVER, as I have said, Nippit was a good " old man " in other ways—until the great change came in him. Every individuality has some contradictions, and, generally, the more pronounced the first is, the greater are the latter. Despite his usual meanness, he believed that to keep his men fit and in peace they must be allowed their due rations in proper condition, with a little extra rather than a little less. He also gave us every consideration in bad weather, by stopping all labour except the working of the brig, having hot coffee served out two or three times on cold nights at those times, and even a " tot of grog " to each man occasionally in hours of stress.

Then there was his attitude when Bully Benson fell foul of Dick Somers, a quiet Bristolian who thoroughly knew his work. Benson—like all his kidney—was a " windbag," inefficient and a shirker withal. Quite an ordinary fellow to look at, he had lived the usual reprobate life of his sort, and what he

lacked in stamina he tried to make up in brag. He and Dick—another one who would not attract attention in a crowd—were in the mate's watch; and one night it fell to them to furl the main top-gallant-sail. Owing to Benson's habit of letting the other man—whoever he was—do the most of the work, there were "words" between them when the task was done; and we all knew that they must have been well-deserved, or Dick would not have complained. Briefly, the "words" led to threats on the bully's part, and these were so pronounced that Dick knocked him down, while they were at breakfast on the following morning, when the quarrel was resumed. As was half-expected, the bully did not retaliate; but all that day he went about so full of oaths and fresh threats that, when Dick challenged him to a stand-up fight, he was compelled to accept. The affair took place immediately after four-bells in the second dog-watch—six o'clock—on a small piece of clear deck just forward of the deck-house, and Benson got a thorough thrashing, including a fine black-eye and a split lip. When the "old man" saw these sign-manuals on the following day he inquired into the matter, with the result that he gave Benson the assured sermon, before all hands, called him "the rotten stick in the bundle," and logged him three days' pay for breaking the peace of the ship.

From that day forward we had no bully in the crew, nor any other incident worth recording till we fetched the doldrums, with Christmas close at hand; then there was some fun, in a dead calm on a black night.

It began at one-bell,* near the end of the first watch—midnight—and was in part a preconcerted affair. The apprentice, who happened to have the lee-poop-deck, watching the cabin-skylight clock, struck the signal on the little bell poised over the forward rail. The look-out A.B. repeated it on the big sounder under the fore-stay. A wide-awake member of the watch-out sprang into the fo’c’sle and made it ring with: “Hi, there! Hi, there! Shake a leg, shake a leg! One-bell, you sleepers, an’ a fine Christmas Eve!”

About the main-hatch, where the unemployed members of the first watch had slept † away their hours of duty, there was a general stir, rubbing of eyes and looking for pipes. Under the break of the poop, where the apprentices congregated with their salad stories of sea life, things were much the same. One of the apprentices leapt into the “half-deck.” A hubbub followed in there.

The mate had given a caution that his relief was not to be called. The brig was, as I have said, a homely packet, and the mate’s intention was to play the “old man” a practical joke that would serve the double ends of giving him a “shaking up” and have to be pardoned because of time and manner. A significant stillness filled the brig. Scarcely did a

* One-bell proper means the end of the first half-hour of the watch; but fifteen minutes before the end of each night watch, and at a quarter to four in the afternoon, a second one-bell is always struck as a signal to call the watch out to relief.

† During fine nights in the tropics, when far from land and not employed at the sails, wheel, or look-out, the “windjammer” sailor is mostly to be found stretched out in some shadow thrown by the moon. He gets into the shadow lest he should be “moonstruck” by sleeping in the light of the tropical moon.

spar creak in its "parral"; and the snoring of Denis in his sty by the foremast could be heard distinctly about the waist. The watch was out fore and aft, except the second mate; and men and youths stood here and there in clusters, armed ready for the fray, and talking in whispers.

At the first stroke of eight-bells on the poop, tin pans, old paint "drums," the ship's foghorn, bells forward and abaft, an out-of-tune melodion, hurrahs, the squealing of Denis forward, and the cockerel's crowing aft, all combined in a howling chorus that out-did the best gathering of low-caste Dervishes between Tangiers and Scutari. Out tumbled Nippit, his eyes blinking in the light of the cabin-lamp. What the "infernal noise was about" he did not know, could not guess; but by the volume and complexity of his opinion he had a hazy notion of having somehow got into a composite of "Frisco's Chinatown," an old-time, Limehouse, twopenny "gaff" in a riot, and the launching of a new brig from a Tyneside yard.

Two hours before this he had solitarily emptied his third half-tumbler of Schiedam (so the cook-steward afterwards said), in honour of the night, in memory of happier ones, and in fuddled imagination of the fireside at home; muttering the while that if the mate was not such a pig-headed and unsociable fool, he would call him into the cabin and have a "tot" together. But the state in which he had turned in was a small block to his stumbling along the alley-way. The hullabaloo had also called out the second officer, who had been allowed to sleep on

in order that he, too, might have a little scare. His berth opened off the passage, and at its doorway the two men collided.

Backwards into the den went the officer. The "old man" gave him a mouthful of his choicest hailings, whilst recovering himself from the bulk-head opposite, then continued his forward rush of inquiry. On the doormat inside the eighteen-inch high threshold lay, as usual, Rats, his fox terrier. This he forgot. Rats intuitively knew his master's mental condition. That verbal volley and the hastened blundering formed an explanatory volume to the dog; which, already flurried by that unearthly "ringing-in," made a dodging effort to escape cabin-wards. The result was a foul with the "old man's" shins, then a dart past on the part of Rats, as his master tripped over the threshold into a heap on the deck, spluttering sets of words such as almost made an impression on the planks, and quite sent the adjacent pair of apprentices flying for the safety of their skins among the pumps by the main-mast.

Up he sprang, like the nimble man he was, middle-aged notwithstanding; and up the poop-ladder he bounded. At the mate he blared out a question as to the cause of the rumpus. If ever a man knew another, our chief officer knew the master; he seemed to have sounded him to the extent of knowing the latitude and longitude of every finger-spot. While through the still air ran the whisper, "the 'old man's' out," the mate blustered back, with extra emphasis for "cumshore"—well aware that only by out-

heroding Herod would he put the king of the poop into his proper place.

Said he, not to record certain more inelegant phrases, we were "ringin' Christmas in, in proper ship-shape and Bristol fashion, as every Christian ship afloat should! *He* wasn't afraid o' scarrin' the flyin' fishes out o' the water, nor o' seeing Christmas-Day come in on his sins, big as they were; and those who did—well, those who did had better go down on their 'holy stones'"—(knees).

As he always did on such occasions—the very reverse of his actions when met by no answering thunder—Nippit turned away, silent. At the next step his naked foot caught in the bight of a line hanging from the main-mast belaying-pins, and he dropped with a thud that shook the poop-deck.

Just as he struck the planks the heavens opened, as they do nowhere but in the doldrums.

"Stand by!" roared out the mate, blaming himself for neglecting to watch the weather during the preparation of his joke, and thinking that a puff would follow, in accordance with the nautical adage, "Rain before wind, take your topsails in; wind before rain, let your topsails remain."

The released watch tore through the falling sheet of water and the black night for the fo'c'sle; the others did the same, in search of their "oilskins," leaving the mate and his unrelieved helmsman—myself—to stand-by. The second officer had skipped back to his berth, to dress. Rats sat under the cabin-table, watching the entrance to the alley-way, trembling, listening for the well-known curses, and

fully expecting a piece of ratlin-line for his share in the tripping-up business, probably preceded by the sudden coming of a boot from some mysterious direction and all too correctly aimed at his innocent self. The steward, who had jumped out at the ringing-in, had also hurried back to his bunk.

With his last order, the mate—apparently forgetting his grim joke on the skipper, and thinking that the latter had gone below—slipped aft to the binnacle, eyed the compass-card a moment, then stepped forward for his oiled coat, lying over the fore-rail of the poop. Not half a minute had passed from the skipper's fall. Since then he had tried to kick off the bight of the line and get away; but, in his excited hurry to be out of that flattening shower-bath, this had further entangled him. Now he reared up, spluttering at the rain, and in apparently a low tone out-cursing even a Thames bargee, and put out his hand to free the imprisoned limb.

Intent on his "oilskin," yet with his senses preternaturally fixed in the air—in a way—to intercept the expected squall, the mate ducked under the spanker-boom and tumbled over Nippit.

Then the anathemas were loud and emphatic, as before they had been deep and uncertain. He, already half-maddened out of his few wits, must have considered this a deliberate insult. No doubt ignorant as to who the stumbler was, he rolled over on him, and began to batter the mate to the very best of his half-sober ability. I held on to the wheel, knowing the mate to be the better man.

By the depth and colour of those expressions

the latter knew his assailant. He put the attack down to the score of pure spleen, occasioned by the rousing-out. Log-books and discipline were being swallowed in the cavernous maw of hot blood and pain. Primarily, the ringing-in was the root of the trouble, but the impenetrable blackness was wholly the cause of its protraction.

Into it all hammered the rain—enough to lay a western ocean swell, though all it did for them was the half-drowning of what noise they made, by its own beating on the decks. To the wheel I held and watched the compass—my sole business—got drenched to the skin, and awaited wind and relief, in irritable impatience of the latter, and in some knowledge of the outrage on “peace and goodwill” then being enacted by the main-mast. In truth, this proved to be a quiet pommelling into which both men—now aware of each other’s identity—incidentally felt how unwise it would be to draw an inferior.

Then, dressed and encased in “oilskins,” out came the second-officer. He turned on his heel, sibilantly whistling “Christians, awake, salute the happy morn” (so said one of the returned apprentices) and glided up the poop-ladder, in his noiseless, American, rubber-boots. At the top, no doubt thinking to show the mate his full appreciation of the merry occasion, he struck into a slide aft, taking the binnacle light as a guide through the wall-like darkness, and changed his whistle to the humming of “Rise to a-dore”—thwack! He had gone bodily over the struggling, clawing combatants.

Before he could regain his feet or properly ascertain

the cause of his fall, the relief for the wheel—hurrying along to save being growled at for laxity in relieving—bounded up the ladder, took a leap aft from the top of it, and dropped, he swore afterwards, plump on the front of Nippit's cushion-like middle. Luckily he also wore "rubbers."

Fully to hide the trouble was now impossible. I had heard the new-comers, missed them; and into my inquiries as to what was the matter, came the confused ejaculations of the floundering quartet. The rain was slackening. The watches were gathering aft, in hope of receiving a "tot" of grog per man to commemorate the time, and entirely ignorant that he from whom they expected the liquor would have prevented such a ringing-in, had he been previously consulted.

Then speedily the news was whispered of a fight being in progress on the poop—a battle on the ship's holy of holies, and on Christmas-Eve to boot! Up the ladders came men and apprentices, within a minute of my relief, and as they would not have dared to come on a similar occasion in daylight.

Ah! but the check had come; wisdom had poked his dry, sober old nose into that scene of folly; order was creeping into chaos. The mate had contrived to whisper something to the skipper's ear. Just as the crowd grouped around, their two superiors arose, each with a man by the nape of his neck, the "old man" having the second-officer, and the mate gripping the A.B. for the wheel.

Gruff, breathless questions were asked, apparently to the darkness, and expostulating answers given

from the same. The men fell away. Words were being said about sifting the matter out in the cabin, about log-books and penalties, and about that being a nice time of year to fight on the ship's poop—all this as the two couples went down the port-ladder, near which the trouble had occurred, the prisoners meanwhile averring their innocence.

Dripping like swabs from a deck-tub, the party entered the cabin, and Rats saw that there were other interests aboard the ship just then than what concerned him and ratlin-line. Many severe and blustering queries were put in seeming seriousness and answered as strenuously—the mate having whispered the diplomacy of blaming the other two as the brawlers: at least, from hearsay and what I knew, we argued the matter out in this manner.

In the end peace was made—solely out of consideration for the Eve, said Nippit. Then he and the mate (both of them seeing, doubtlessly, what fools they had been, and neither of them having a bruise in sight) called in all hands—the second-mate, the lookout-man and me excepted—and grog was served to all. The following day was a fine one, our whereabouts considered, and it passed off happily enough. But future occasions saw rather upsetting sequels to that ushering-in on the poop of the good brig *Henry Martin*. As a matter-of-fact, we never believed that the “old man” quite forgave the mate for his part in the affair, for there were occasions when we saw that he was doing a little towards levelling up the account between them. At the same time he dared not do much, because the Vera Cruz incident

and some smaller slips by-the-way had given a little balance of power to the mate, who was certainly our favourite of the two; but what he could not level up with his chief-officer he put on to our slates.

Never before in the course of my experience afloat—and only once afterwards, in the *Velocity*—did I witness so great a change of bearing in a man, on so small a reason—at least, small to us generally. But, then, character had to be allowed for, and largely in Nippit's case. From a preaching, queer, little man with an undying fondness for "clipping" wherever he could and putting the "clippings" into his own pocket, he became downright mean and spiteful withal. Everywhere he possibly could he made us feel the iron of his authority—in food, extra time on deck, and in work regardless of the weather. The mate's efforts to befriend us were useless—more, they made him worse. The change in our life was pitiful, and what helped to make it worse was the fact that, with the exception of Benson, we were a peace-loving, homely crew. What had caused the alteration in him we could only guess. We put it down to his thinking that in the Christmas-Eve episode his dignity—or what he considered to be his dignity—had suffered such a sea-change that nothing less than real tyranny would repay the damage done. So it was that from a peaceful, easy-working, dutiful "crowd" we were turned into a set of men and boys who were ready for any mischief short of mutiny, or desertion on the high seas. Had the opportunity been ours, minus the possibility of authoritative

retaliation, we would gladly have ducked Nippit severely—even keel-hauled him.

Such was the condition of things when a leak in our fresh-water tank compelled us to put into Graciosa, Azores—or, as sailors call them, the Western Isles. It was about an hour from sunset when work was finished; and as Nippit had gone ashore to hurry up the ever-slow Portuguese and get them to the work on the following morning, the mate left us free, and things generally were settling down to that state of peacefulness which is seldom a feature of the steamer. A rotund naiad of the harbour—piece of shining, ebon subtlety, a younger Marie—paddled her wares to the new market, knowing that as our dirty-white wings were fast in their gaskets, we should be free to make what bargains we could with her, from getting a lump of coloured coral for a gay, cotton-handkerchief to selling our souls for fresh fruit, &c.—providing at all times that we left our bodies for the vessel's work, that we bartered away none of her stores, and that, as the “articles” always have it, we brought no spirituous liquors on board.

To one who had seen the like before and understood the niceties of the situation, it was a pretty and a humorous scene. A cable-length or so to port and astern withal two more dusky nymphæ were keeping her company, in a deferential way, and making for the brig's opposite side to that on which the fat one intended to board; for although they were considerably younger and lighter than she was, they had (as I learnt on the following day) a just horror of her hands and weight; yet they had as much, if

not more, horror of her tongue. Bumboat-trading being one that requires a natural deftness in the use of words, it perforce draws only those who are apt in this great necessity of the calling; and a little experience among those who follow it makes one think that the Persians are right in that proverb of theirs, where they say: "Ten measures of speech were sent to earth, and woman took nine of them."

As for those three, the two partners still hung off, with a respect that provoked a few quiet laughs amongst us, as we watched them from the break of the fo'c'sle-head. While the other—her whole bearing seemed to say, "Pah, dey no come spoil ma melon-patch." We had seen the like before then.

Presently, after taking care to keep her boat just where and how we could see the fine fruit in it, she pulled alongside, hitched her painter to the channel-iron of the fore-shroud-deadeye. Then, with a nimbleness that no one would expect at sight, she got herself to the rail and dropped aboard—some ten or eleven stone of bouncing blackness, under five feet high, garbed in a thin knee-skirt and a light wrap of repellent colours curiously twisted about her bust, and in one hand a piece of line with a rude hook at the two ends, both line and hook being in a condition that seemed to hint of Columbus. By the means of this "gear," however, she, turning again to the rail and leaning over it, drew up one of her baskets of eggs, bread and beautiful fruit!

With the basket in her hands, her naked feet regardless of the oven-like deck, and on her large facial spread a smile that would make the fortune

of a music-hall "knockabout," she came towards us, to be greeted with, each salutation being from a different tongue: "Here, old gal, this ain't the fancy-dress affair as you went to last night!" "Go 'ome an' change, or you'll take cold an' cut your Jimmy!" "Not she! She's on'y grown out on her clothes—ain't you, ole dude?" "No, she arn't; she got up too soon arter dinner an' put on 'er little sister's in mistake—didn't yer, 'oney?" "Say, Crow's-wing, have they been stuffin' you for a prize-show?"

Having let us expend our raillery, a diplomatic move that was dictated by an expectancy of good humour and some pleasant bartering, she replied largely thus: "Hi, dere, you ole dude, li'lel chick-a-biddy, Crow's-wing-w'ite sail'r-man, you shanjey-for-shanjey?—Plenty mush fine banana, sweet mango, eb'ryting got." "Have you a monkey, Sally?" cried one, knowing very well that she had no such thing. "No, sar; monkey on shore. Eb'ryting else got"—"Got any baccy?" asked another, after an inquisition of her basket. "No, tell you—tobac' no got; all finish to schooner, go 'way las' nite, Yankeeman, bad man, no pay. Eb'ryting else"—"Well, let's 'ave some butter, little Toothsome—'aven't tasted a bit for sixty days!" the bo'sun interrupted quickly, at the same time dropping a hatch-batten wedge so near to her bare foot as to make her step aside sharply; yet within the same minute she was at his elbow, whispering, "Butter no sell, sar; but fine rum got, good rum, bes' rum in de 'arbour."

The bo'sun, as properly became such a link between officers and men, looked away ahead, sighed, thought how infernally hot it was, and inquired what she wanted a pound for her grapes. Then began the bartering. But first of all a few fugitive coins, bearing the traces of long-idling and smelling of shipboard associations, were ferreted out and quickly exchanged for luscious fruit, which disappeared as speedily as the Indian street-juggler utters his cry of "Dick-poo, dick-poo!" This did but whet our appetites, and make us eager for a sufficiency; hence a couple of dozen ship's biscuits (worth there, because of their lasting qualities, three times their ordinary value) surreptitiously paid for more cooling and juicy delicacies. A striped wool-and-cotton shirt—several times worn, never washed, and closely examined by the belle of the boat—went for two melons, a pineapple, and some soft bread of a deplorable quality. Next a dungaree jacket, clean, but with a hole in one pocket, fetched half a stone of mixed fruit and six eggs, the latter so small that bantams must have laid them.

Then came the gem of her moving storehouse—rum, put up in a pickle-jar and kept in by a piece of shark-skin being tied over the neck. This, with certain cryptic signs, which the uninitiated would never have translated as "a drink," and with sundry glances aft in search of unwanted intruders, she only half-produced from under a pile of small fruit. But that peep and those signs were enough. Eyes sparkled and whispers went round, for previous similar mysteries had left a residue of knowledge

in the onlookers. Eighty-three days and never a chance of a taste! Wasn't it enough to tempt an angel out of heaven for a change? What did she want for the precious stuff? These and other remarks were immediately said in hurried, low tones. Then came in her ebonship's subtlety.

“Oh, mush—mush more'n you gib. Dis pore ship, plenty pore ship, no money got, an' not'ing got for shanjey-shanjey.” But we had other things, and we wanted to barter. No, we hadn't the worth of the rum amongst us, she declared. She had shown it only to let us see that she had it. And away went her attention along the deck, as though the matter at hand was of no moment to her. Whilst we discussed the point, she looked aft to where her two rivals in trade were doing a little legitimate business with the second-mate, the cook-and-steward and “Chips” on the main-hatch. Well, they were welcome to what they made; she knew they would not venture forward while she was there; hers was the market she had come to find, she had tested its wealth, sapped its resources, and was glad at its state.

So far all was well. The little money and the biscuits were all right. For the clothes she could obtain a fourfold value amongst her male acquaintances, because clothing costs much labour on the part of the naturally lazy, even though ever so scanty a supply be needed. As for the fruit, it required only gathering, and was never all gathered. Now she had come to that which was, to her buyers, at any-rate, worth more than money; because they had

no money with which to buy, and that was the fact for which she had been fishing. Thus, pretending to pity our deplorably-poor condition, also our being in such an ill-found packet, and acting as though she had neither intention nor expectation of selling the liquor to us, she—fearing to be seen from aft, and exceedingly careful not to be—gave each of us a tiny “tot” out of the coveted jar.

Tantalus was never more tried than they were. By this time she knew our state, in and out. She spent a little while in spinning us lies of the imaginary vessels and men which she said she had previously served. Then, after a number of unheeded importunities, each man was allowed to have another sip from the jar. But we wanted the jar; and some of us tried to draw her away, so that the others would get a chance to steal the thing. In her composition, however, there was too much of that other coloured personage for such tyros in subtlety to hoodwink her.

After contriving to let us see a bigger jar, she insinuated her readiness (with her “weather-eye” aft all the time) to part from her treasures—the price, a small coil of new line. Wouldn’t a tin of paint do? some one asked guiltily. Yes, paint good, plenty good. That was an article which took up little room; it could be easily stowed out of sight. One was obtained and exchanged there and then for the sampled jar. Oh, no, she couldn’t let the big, full one go for only a tin of paint. She knew that when the first jar was emptied, some of us would barter almost our hopes of heaven for another; then, if she could but arrive on the scene before its effects

passed off, she would be able to get that coil of line—probably for some coasting skipper who had given her an order, for English-made manilla line was a costly thing in the Azores.

The short twilight was ending. She moved aft to do a little trade in the rivals' preserves, leaving her plot to mature meanwhile. Her rivals took her place; the night thickened; presently the whole three went ashore. At the end of an hour “Crow’s-wing,” as the bo’sun had nicknamed her all along, was back aboard—with less fruit, more rum, and silent as a shark in the wake of a ship with death aboard. This time she came over the rail further forward. At the end of six or seven minutes the surrounding darkness had swallowed her and her satisfied desire.

Morning came, in all its sub-tropic splendour. Most of us were slow in turning-to, but quick to the galley at coffee-time. Our appearance and movements gave unmistakable evidence of a secret debauch. “How did they get it?” the mate must have asked himself. Then he went on a round of discovery, came upon the truth, but said nothing to Nippit. The result, however, was that no more bumboat-women were allowed alongside in that harbour—which we left after a four days’ stay, to experience the same treatment all the way to the Thames, and wish, in consequence, that we could find some further means of retaliation. From being as contented a set of men as could have been got together under the circumstances, we had grown to be ripe enough for mutiny.

But we had a little revenge when we were paid-off in the old "Chain-locker" on Tower Hill—as seamen used to speak of the Mercantile Marine office there, because the way into it was down two long flights of steep, stone steps, which ended in a narrow yard open to the sky. In sober truth, although the place was rarely marked by heat and flame of riotous action, it was one of the hell-spots of East London. Daily during office hours around the top of it there was ever a small shoal of land-sharks, male and female, with the former preponderating in numbers and practically heedless of the police. Their sole prey was "homeward-bounders" *i.e.* merchant-seamen and stokers being paid off—with the sailorman proper the most desired of all. And the tales that could be told of cajolery that began there, to end in robbery and violence ere morning——!

When the shipping-master told Nippit that he could not charge a penny more for advanced money than the proper currency of the dollars, or whatever they were, at the time and place of transaction, any "galoot" could have picked his pockets unknown to him; and if he that night fell into the hands of a "shark" down Limehouse-way, he got no more than he deserved.

CHAPTER X

A great-little personality : The bugbear of dog-watches : An odd pair : Toilette under difficulties : A man of patches : "Jack's exhibition-day" : Playing a joke on "the pair" : At Cape Town : In a hurricane : A monstrous bag of dread : Losing a man : A short respite : A fall from aloft : Heaving-to : "Scaldings !" : A shark aboard : The green-horn's predicament : In hospital : A paying-off surprise.

AFTER leaving the *Henry Martin* I went up the Mediterranean, had a memorable spell at Constantinople, then luxuriated back to Malta and home, as recorded in "My Vagabondage." Having failed to obtain work on shore, in furtherance of the design of my life, I shipped east once more, in the *Bucclerque*, an up-to-date, Merseyite, steel clipper of 2000 tons. With the exception of some fights—in which I happily had no share—and a spell in Calcutta hospital because of a slight sunstroke, that was one of the pleasantest voyages that I ever experienced. There were twenty-four of us in the fo'c'sle—representatives of nearly every maritime nation in Europe, and two blacks to boot, one of them, who answered to the name of Alan Robin, being one of the finest chantymen that ever sang a song while pulling on a rope.

He was a native of the Seychelles and a character in his way. But *the* personality in the "crowd" was one Robert McIvor (McEvor, he would have it), a small, dapper man with a short, pointed

beard, which he always kept in good order. As a "fo'c'sle-sailor" he was worth the V.G. on his discharges, and a piece of canvas for a new clothes-bag over and above; for he was soon christened "The Windbag," to his knowledge, but not always to his annoyance. (This is the usual appellation bestowed by seamen on any one of their number who is given to expressing lengthy opinions on many subjects.)

But McIvor was not merely a "windbag." He had some brains—and his moods. Yes; he was not one of your unvarying, tiresome gabblers who put in their respective oars to help your boat along in time and out of season, with or against the tide. There were occasions when he sat in his corner of the fo'c'sle, straining his middle-aged eyes to read from an ancient volume of *The Young Ladies' London Journal*; he momentarily too proud and whimsical to be seen wearing his spectacles, which at another time he would put on with but little reason for their use. About him arguments and contentions, political, religious, or seafaring, might rage with all the violence of cross equinoctial currents or opposing West Indian squalls; yet it was all the same to McIvor. There he sat, stolid as the figurehead on a Gulf of Bothnia brig, seemingly as interested in his reading as a girl of forty years ago would have been in the same quasi-romantic tales of lords and ladies, handsome parlourmaids, grooms, and love. Yet in reality he was following every line of argument, but refraining from launching into their troubled waters, and that by the sheer force of a whim to appear indifferent to what was being said.

At another time he would be sitting on an up-turned bucket, or on his watch's water keg, by the door of their fo'c'sle if that happened to be the lee-side, or the weather one in a fine dog-watch. (The fo'c'sle was a capital deck-house just abaft the foremast, and had a door to port, one to starboard, and a slightly-incomplete middle bulkhead fore and aft.) Some one would raise the question of the best way to rig a jury-rudder, or the safest method of sending up a new topsail-yard in a heavy breeze. Instantly McIvor would cease his alternating play with Denis over the foot-high doorstep on the starboard side, his criticizing a young seaman's patching of clothes inside the fo'c'sle, and his intermittent reading of a dilapidated copy of a Waverley novel, to precipitate his curious little figure into the smoking and expectorating council—declaring quietly that every one was wrong, hopelessly wrong, to his thinking. By a method of reasoning, that aimed at proving all the world to be upside down with the arguer alone on his feet, he would then set hard to work to prove what he said.

And what talk was there ! Ye lawyers, land, sea, and otherwise, would that ye had heard it ! Not for its wit, as wit is understood ; not for its humour, meant as such ; not for its logic, though Jack is usually a fairly-reasoning creature ; nor for its fiery eloquence. No. Even if he talked through two dog-watches—as he did at times—and was prepared to continue indefinitely, his somewhat thin, treble voice poured out its words like the straight, unhurrying rain of a windless day in a wet autumn. Waiting

for the "point" was more than exasperating. Others might break in with an endeavour to talk him down. At such times, McIvor's head (abnormally broad at its top, then quickly tapering down to a pointed chin, and a neck on which a fourteen-sized go-ashore collar was like a main yard grummet on top-sail yard) would keep up a series of nods, he the while continuing his line of argument. Short interjected remarks and questions he would answer in a sort of parenthesis, looking at his questioner; then go on as before, to the company generally.

But though in all he said there was not the wit of brilliant repartee, the humour of a funny remark, nor the logic of a well-reasoned argument ending in an unassailable dictum, yet he held the even tenor of his way to the extent of driving off his opponents by ones or twos, if time allowed him to. So that he commonly arose at eight-bells, with but a couple of listeners left—a Finn with a big, shapeless head and lumbering gait, and Alan Robin. To those two McIvor was a basilisk with decided power. They would work themselves blind with perspiration in doing their shares and his part of a task, while he stood idly by, talking to them. For, just as in his long talks there was a steady persevering subtlety in explaining his theories just enough to leave a slight mystification in the minds of his listeners, so was he too subtle to let his natural laziness appear to be absolute shirking of his work. In his way he was one of the finest of phlegmatic hypocrites who ever hauled on a line. His moods were far too human to be artistic, when he was off duty; but where artfulness

would free him of a physical effort he could be as fine an artist in dissembling as ever practised under the sign of a misleading smile. There was no difficult piece of sailorizing but he knew it, knew it well; and none too simple for him to shirk, though the effort to do so cost him more than the work would have done.

Then the one remarkable fact about his laziness was that it did not affect his cleanliness. His work considered, he was the cleanest man aboard, "Old Dobbs" perhaps excepted. Never did he go to a meal without first washing his hands. His face was washed every day, and often twice in a day. He regularly took a bath once a week, and in the ship there were hard-working, energetic men who thought it quite enough to wash their faces two or three times a week. Often was he growled at for using more than his portion of the watch's daily allowance of fresh water. At those times, he being a particularly peaceful man, he would fill the deck-tub with salt water, always in a night watch-out, and give his limbs and body—which were built on the same plan as his head was—a scrubbing in that.

He took especial pride in asserting that he was a direct descendant of the chief of his clan. If a hearer ever doubted this, he certainly had to listen till he devoutly regretted his previous doubts; and if one believed it at once he was compelled to hear some of the pedigree as proof of the claim. Another trait of his, and a distinguishing one because of his carrying it to the extreme, was his fitful endeavour to speak with a cultured English accent. Whenever

he began on a long talk it was with this effort royal-yard high, so to write ; but it soon dropped down to the deck. Then, with his rather slight, over-the-border burr in full evidence, he would make a fresh attempt ; fail as before, and try and fail till work or sleep put an end to his endeavours.

Next to it, in point of interest of this sort, were the changes he rang on the pronunciation of his name. Some one would call him "MacIvor" ; straight-away he would say that the heads of his clan, "the Mac-Evors of Liverpool," pronounced the name "Mac-Evor," and that their name was his name. In a few days' time he would return to using the "I," because, he said, it was anciently so spoken. That he was a bore goes without saying ; and it may be guessed that he often received scant courtesy at the hands—tongues, I mean—of some of his ship-mates. He was too insignificant for a quarrel.

That he could read, and had read many books, was a certainty. But his further ability with a pen than to scrawl his name on the Articles was always held in doubt. This was backed up by the fact that the only two letters (both, by-the-way, to an address in "Tiger Bay," Cardiff), which he sent home during that voyage, he got me to write, on the pretext that he had sprained his right thumb on the first occasion and given his wrist a wrench on the second one. Taking him all-in-all, he was as good an instance of a "fo'c'sle-sailor"—good inside and poor on deck and aloft—as one could meet between Shanghai and the Isle of Dogs.

Following McIvor in the matter of interest were

Dobbs and Paddy ; but over him they had the advantage of being a badly-matched pair. They were both in the mate's watch. The former was sixty-five years old, if a day ; but on the ship's articles he was entered as being forty-eight, and place of birth Blackwall, yet where he was born he had not the slightest idea. That he must then have been past sixty was established as a fact by some months of carefully listening to his conversation.

Had he been a yarn-spinner, he would have inevitably borne definite witness against himself, for that is the trap which all deceivers herein are unconsciously caught ; but an ordinary seaman with a record of two years on the coast and one deep-water voyage would have out-spun him in a single dog-watch. No, it was only by close, unobtrusive attention to his remarks on the yarns and talk of others that one could sum him up. By this it was obvious that he had been a " packet-rat " in his early days ; and I could swear that he first saw the light much nearer the Mersey than the Thames. But, then, he gave out his home as being by Stepney Causeway, himself as a ratepayer of his parish, and one whom long years a Middlesex resident had entitled to some degree of county respect.

Now Paddy, as near as he could tell, was about the same age : he signed—or marked—himself as having seen fifty years, but among his shipmates he rather boasted of what he thought to be his proper age. Unlike Paddy, Dobbs never swore. On the least provocation—and at times with none—the Irishman's large, stubble-covered, and mis-shapen

mouth would splutter venom and tobacco-juice—the modified brogue being slightly flavoured with a Yankee, nasal half-tone. I write “stubble-covered” because he never shaved, nor did he allow the hair to grow. His razor was a pair of large scissors in the first stage of rustiness; and blow high or blow low, in port or out, he religiously, every Sunday morning, cut his beard, whiskers, and moustache as short as the shears would cut them. The time for the operation was usually the first thing after breakfast, if it happened to be his watch out and some one else’s turn at the wheel; and if his wheel, then—when his pipe was lit—it became the first personal thing done on leaving the poop. But, when it was his forenoon watch-in, he occasionally varied the matter by putting the scissors to duty before breakfast. Whatever the weather, or other circumstances, might be, Paddy was never known to allow this item of his toilet to linger past the meridional eight-bells. When engaged at this in choppy weather, he was a subject to delight and interest any observant mind. Even with his spectacles on, he could not see well enough in the fo’c’sle; thus he would be seen out on deck, his short, black clay in one corner of his mouth, the scissors at work on the opposite side of his face, head slightly-thrown back, an old, blotched, sixpenny mirror in his left hand, legs wide apart, and his four-feet-six-inches of stature unconsciously flung into a most Tamburlaine pose.

Then over would come a sheet of spray (the heavier the better for our fun, so be that it was not more than spray) and strike him on the back, or

full on his inclined face; thereupon would follow a "three-stranded" oath, a hurried dash of Paddy, pipe, and tonsorial gear for the fo'c'sle door—to emerge again in a couple of minutes, dripping, but determined to finish the task.

In the early part of the voyage some of the men began the practice of interrupting the matter by bogus cries of set this or that sail, or take one in, according to the weather. But after the first alarm they always failed; and Paddy would smilingly ask them if they had forgotten that he "wore a red shirt and slept in a top bunk," which was equivalent to saying that he was no fool, nor a "stand-back" in the presence of trouble.

Now Dobbs was a far cleaner man than the Irishman had energy to be, or even thought necessary. In short, he was a much better representative of the humble British householder, whose second god is Respectability, than Paddy could have attained to be. This was seen in the fact that no one ever thought of being so familiar as to address the little Stepneyite by his Christian name, any more than they dreamt of calling the other Malone. A change in either case would have been so far unfriendly as to have bordered on an insult. Just as regularly as the latter did his barbering on the morning of the Sabbath, so did Dobbs scrupulously shave himself on Saturday-afternoon, then trim his gingery-white moustache with scissors which might have been the twins of his watchmate's. Not only were these two diminutive men—Dobbs was just half an inch taller than Paddy—in the same watch, but they

had a pair of bunks between them, the latter having the upper one because he was the more sprightly ; their two X's followed each other on the Articles ; they chummed together more than either of them did with anyone else, worked together ; and while Paddy grumbled and blasphemed at the pace and occasional blunders made by the other, he never received a word in return anent his own shortcomings. Even as the Irishman had his four particularly-distinguishing traits—oaths, tobacco-juice, shuffling movements that were quick for one of his age, and uncommonly bright and alert though rather small eyes—so, too, had the other his four : *i.e.* slow speech, movements which appeared to be occupied with thought, a parchmenty skin that was too thin and seemingly-transparent to be parchment, and patches. Whatever article of clothing that man was seen to possess between his joining the ship in East India Dock and the last Sunday before reaching the Cape, it was patched. Of some of his apparel one could manage to find the original, but even the picking to pieces of others would have still left his feat an impossibility. Some men asked him if he patched his soap to prevent its wearing out ; and Paddy—not forgetting a due amount of rudeness—swore that he would certainly have patched Joseph's coat, and have put a piece on the weather cloth of the Garden of Eden to keep the heavenly breezes out. Even the elbows and knees of his new dungaree trousers and jackets were patched. He did not chew tobacco—another difference between the two—on principle, he was too clean for that ; but he consumed a

plenitude in smoke and ashes, and earned it all—and to spare—by patching for his shipmates.

Then came the surprise. When signing Articles at Tower Hill, Dobbs had appeared dressed in a fairly decent manner for an A.B.; but on the Sunday preceding our mid-week arrival at Cape Town there was a general and almost silent muster of all hands to inspect the contents of his clothes-line. Now a fine Sunday at sea is—in sailing ships—known as “Jack’s exhibition-day”: It is then that he takes out his best clothes, other best things generally, and his curios, to air them; and on the first such day at sea on an “outward-bounder” much curiosity is usually expended to know the contents of each other’s chest. Thus far Dobbs had shown no “go-ashore” finery; but on this day not only did his line bear two pairs of good white drill trousers, and two suits of soft, thin, Chinese under-flannels, but they were accompanied by a black alpaca jacket every whit as fine as the mate’s own. What was the matter? mutely asked every wondering face. Did the man want to out-dress the captain himself? Had he stolen the things, or how had he come by them? Dobbs said nothing, and all hands seemed too much astonished to put any questions to him. The only remark that outlived the day was from Paddy, and consisted of a muttered avowal “to lay the mean stitching divil up for a week so that *he* could wear his foine clothes.”

Among other things, Dobbs was an abstainer; Paddy was not, and the former often performed the charitable task of helping the latter on board at

night—for which he always received curses, and occasionally something worse. Paddy would freely express his opinion on anything or person, yet was far from being vindictive ; the other never ventured more than a mild remark at any time.

As witness : One night in the north-east trade-wind, when the first watch had relieved the second dog-watch, some of us younger men kept Paddy in an argument till Dobbs was turned in. Then we eased down, and let the old man go to his bunk ; but we kept with him, talking as we went, for we had prepared some fun by removing the boards under his bed and leaving it supported on a few ropeyarns—all in order, however, to a casual glance. While Paddy undressed, smoking and spluttering all the time, we stood in the two doorways, stirring-up the argument afresh, so as to keep his attention from the bunk. Dobbs was then lying flat on his back, smoking peacefully, without a word. Having put off his outer clothes and re-lit his pipe, Paddy got on to the chest that served him and Dobbs as a seat, close to the side of and on the level with the latter's bunk. There he stood to turn down his blanket, still hammering out the argument, and unsuspecting of what was about to happen. Then he turned around, gave a heavy bow-shot at us and our lack of intelligence, and—with his habitual spring, always made to show that he was not an old man—over the bunk-board he went, and down came his bed, himself, his pipe and his spluttered maledictions full-length on inoffensive Dobbs. And what a case of fireworks that was !—while the poor Stepneyite struggled for

breath and his lighted pipe, the bed between him and Paddy being just the size of the bunk. Of course, we fled at the fall—to creep back again at once and listen outside to the language within, meantime the members of their watch looked and laughed, or swore for peace, and Dobbs said not a word.

Our first port of call was Cape Town—where we had to discharge the coal, because of a strike amongst the labourers ; and yet a party of us could do a long tramp out and back around “ The Lion ” in an evening, singing songs as we went, after shovelling coals in the hold all day. It was a happy stay of six weeks, during which we saw the breakwater broken up in a great gale, and the *Sierra Nevada*, a fine full-rigger, go ashore. Then an apprentice, two of my fo’c’sle friends, two young acquaintances from the Custom House and I climbed Table Mountain, while a “ cloth ” was spread over it thickly. It was a fine escapade, a rollicking affair, but rather too much of a land ingredient to be quite at home in a mess of sea-pie. Then, aye, and away we went again for Calcutta, and enjoyed fairly fine weather from the Cape to within about two days’ sail from the Mauritius. There a hurricane came down on us ; and of all days in the week, in fact the day on which such things usually happen at sea, we had it on a Sunday.

At two-bells in the middle watch the weather was almost all that one could wish it to be. We were then running along before a smart eight-knot breeze, with all plain sails set alow and aloft. But at five-bells there came a change. Steadily, yet all too surely for our comfort, the wind increased until

shortening sail became a necessity, despite the fact that the breeze was aft. Striking the port quarter of the poop, it whistled along the deck, through the rigging and the running gear, with a music that is ever pleasing to the seaman's ears when bound on a passage. It was simply the increasing velocity of the breeze that disquieted us. However, the thing had to be done ; so up went the royal clews ; down came the lighter staysails ; these were made fast, and we rested from our labours, in the hope that the ship would thus careen along until Monday morning at least. But such a happy fate was not for us—alas !

The watch was not out ere we had again to tackle the business of reducing canvas. This was further repeated at the change of watches ; and when we were called, at six o'clock, to a still more laborious repetition of that work, the ship was bowling along at fourteen knots an hour under her main and fore-coursers, main and fore-topsails, fore-topmast-staysail and the mizzen-lower-topsail. Now was to come the preliminary tug of war between us and the raging elements—and more. For the tug we were quite prepared, that was, of course, but the rough monotony-breaking tenor of our existence. As for the other—that was in our minds about the same as the idea of death is in the soldier's mind when he goes to war ; it was a possibility, nay, a probability, that lay away at the back of our thoughts, fully known, yet rarely mentioned.

All hands had been mustered, even to the youth who was then making his trial-trip before being bound

an apprentice. About us now howled the doubly increased gale, cold to us because of its coming from what were semi-Antarctic regions in comparison to the latitude we were then in. In the midst of this, under the immediate supervision of the mate (whom some of the men termed a "hard-case," but I found no particular fault with him), we tackled the work, whilst the "old man" (a Dane from Liverpool) gave his broken-English orders from the poop. Borne on the gale came his first wild yell—"Clew up de fore-sail."

And at it we leapt—twenty-one determined, able-bodied dogs, three ordinary ones, two youthful officers, and six prospective "gentlemen of the poop," all at one bull. But what a bull that was! Truth to tell, this final shortening had been left too long. Already the hurricane had well-nigh reached its height, and the *Bucclerque* should have been under her shortest allowance of canvas an hour previous to this. Right before it she swept, the madly-lashed waters hissing and seething under her finely-shaped steel bows, gigantic seas rolling dangerously near her taff-rail; while we lugged and tugged at that lee-fore-clew-line, the sail bellying out over the top-gallant-fo'c'sle and for a time utterly defying our strength to get its clews up to the yard.

At last these were up. Then, panting and almost breathless, aloft we ran to get the sail into its gaskets. That was the beginning of the sad part of the trouble. Port and starboard we spread out along the yard, in front of us a stupendous bag of canvas puffed to bursting point with a gale that was then sending

the ship, under her six sails, northward at the rate of sixteen knots per hour.

“Now, men, gather it in!” shouted the second mate from his position in the bunt.

He was a young and an excellent officer generally ; but “gather it in!” He might as well have bidden us gather in the past years and lost opportunities of our lives. Imagine our efforts to get a grip on that bag. We could have scraped the flesh off our fingers’ ends and still had the round, smooth, maddening thing before us. But for its slight, occasional swaying up and down, it might have been a huge steel balloon dented in the middle by the forestay. Now and then we heard a blur of mispronounced words from the poop, another from the mate’s stentorian lungs more underneath us, and paid no regard to either. The thing before us sapped our attention and patience. It was fast sapping our strength, when the evil came.

Suddenly, without the least warning, down it swayed below us, as the ship swerved off to leeward and put us directly in the lee of the main-sails. The helmsman, momentarily forgetting the dangerousness of his work, had given her too much weather-wheel ; the consequence being, when he “met her,” a quick swing back on her part, until the gale was on her port quarter, slightly forward withal. Then up again came that murderous bag. A single stormy flutter took it from luff to lee. There was another, a lesser downward sway, then a crack as of the mighty whip of a wind-god ; and with it the sail was in two parts, the leeward one sweeping its portion of the yard like a heavy towel brushing away mosquitoes.

Half-checked, involuntary shouts of alarm accompanied this, then a shriek followed instantly. There was a plunge into the impotent, frothing, white foam to leeward, and we had left behind one of the most able though dissolute of A.B.s that ever spliced a rope. Heave-to, put back, hoist out a boat for him? To attempt the first under that canvas must have been almost certain destruction to the ship; to try the other would have been absolutely sure death to those who did so. The wild waters around had him in their insatiable, shark-haunted maw, and out of that no human power could fetch him then dead or alive. For him we could but be sorry—sorry that his end had come at such a time and with barely an instant's notice. Yet our present conditions forbade more than the semblance of a shudder, the vestige of a thought, the shadow of a regret. At the moment we were soldiers, desperately fighting a more ruthless enemy than ever an army met in the field; and each man's fight for himself utterly prevented his more than passing regret at the loss of a fellow-soldier who was hardly a comrade. To the lee-footrope, stirrups and what not, his companions were clinging for dear life. Below, our superiors, in apparently-utter disregard of our having just lost a hand, were yelling orders to hurry up and get the sail stowed. That was no time for sentiment on their part, either; in fact, it was one of those occasions when necessity makes callousness appear to be real instead of forced. Struck and stung by the torn canvas we gathered it in—gathered it in with all the speed of tired arms, for the double reason of our own immediate

danger and, secondary, increasing danger to the ship.

Fresh to the work, we had leapt aloft. Now, wearied with exertions and saddened by that catastrophe, a descent to the decks was made—a slow one, despite the fact that other sails were making as imperative a call as the fore one had done. Then came a reaction back to a fuller sense of our loss ; its meaning was taking possession of us. It was not to be expected, at least not by us, that the mate would pay any attention to the loss of the A.B. ; such “weaknessess” were not in his make. Thus we were not surprised when he gruffly gave the order to man the main-clewlines without a word on the man whom we had lost.

That sail, in spite of its greater size, was, I am pleased to say, secured in the gaskets without mishap. The same good fortune attended those amongst us who were told off to take in the mizzen-lower-topsail. Whilst the latter task was being done, the remainder of us did odd, necessary jobs about the decks, such as coiling up lines and ropes, more securely lashing spare spars, &c.

When all these things were done, it was decided to have breakfast before going on with the work. So to the meal we went, hoping that whilst thus engaged the gale would lessen ; but such luck was not for us at that period. Truth to tell, before we had half-finished refreshing the inner man on “cracker-hash” and the usual ship’s substitute for coffee, there came an order “to hurry up and tumble out on deck quick as possible.” Instead of abating,

the wind was quickly developing into a more thorough-paced hurricane. Although our ship was running before the gale, more canvas must be taken off her—and at once.

I was called to the wheel, as the work on the fore-upper-topsail was tackled—all hands being fully cognizant of their danger and more wary of it because of that sad experience on the yard below. Yet again were we fated for trouble. The suit of sails which the *Bucclerque* then had on was not meant for heavy weather. Scarcely was the topsail clewed up and the buntlines manned when the sail burst in several places. Still, in rags or whole, it had to be made fast as snugly as circumstances would allow. Hence there was another scamper aloft to get in what could be saved.

When a part of the sail had been hauled to its place on the yard, to the accompaniment of the usual “A-yes” and “Ho-hos,” a long broad remnant, madly whisked about in the wind, came up forward, took a man around his chest like a whip-lash coiling around a ninepin, dragged him in an instant from the footrope, and dropped him below. It was more like a boy whipping his top off the ground with an extra heavy slash than anything else I can call to mind.

Again there were involuntary cries. But by a curious series of happenings—a half-grip here, a break there across a stay—the man fetched in on the fore-top; where he was soon picked up limp, senseless, and carried to his bunk, there to be left in the care of the cook and steward, whilst the others re-tackled the work of shortening sail.

After this we were decidedly more saddened, markedly apprehensive of disaster, and therefore less in a condition to ward off any such happening. However, the main-upper-topsail and the fore-lower one were got in without further accident, and when once more on deck we all thought that the duties aloft were over for the time being. But such was not the case. During this work our "old man" had determined to "goosewing" the main-lower-topsail and heave his ship to the wind. So to this last shortening the men and the two young mates went and got through it safely.

Then came the heaving-to. Up to the present not a bucketful of water had boarded us, although a mountainous sea was running—which was owing to the ease of motion combined with stability of the good ship that carried us, and the fact that she was in ballast. Our yards were braced up on the port-tack, the decks generally cleared of movable objects in readiness for the swing to windward. Then the order was given to "Down helm!" and down it went, hard-a-lee. True to the behest of her rudder up swung the ship, and seemed fair to become close-hauled without mishap. Excepting the apprentice, who was making his first voyage, we all knew the danger of this heaving-to. Expectation and anxiety stood on tip-toe, although every face and every tongue was still, and each pair of eyes narrowly watched both our vessel's movements and the on-coming seas.

Abruptly, and with an alarming whirr, up its wire support ran the fore-top-mast-staysail. Some one had omitted to make fast the down hauler. At that

moment the *Bucclerque* was beam-on to the swell ; and the howling gale, filling the upper half of that head sail, stopped her swinging. Spontaneously, the " old man " and the mate yelled out an order to " Haul down that so-so staysail ! "

Too late ! In the next breath there was a shout of " Scaldings ! "—the sailor's warning-cry of water coming. A scurry of boots instantly followed, in the midst of which six feet of the top of a huge green roller mounted our weather-rail from the fore-rigging almost to the poop, then dropped on the deck with a thud like thunder ! Over to leeward it sent the ship, crashed against her opposite bulwarks, and would have burst them out had they not been made of steel.

Now, to and fro across the decks rushed the water, well-nigh waist-deep—a swirling, foaming, illusive tiger in a cage from which it could not break, only filter away through the scuppers and port-holes, a slow process in all conscience. Yet worse than it, in its toils there had come a shark !—small, 'tis true, but big enough to make sad havoc of any leg or arm that should be unlucky enough to get between those murderously-armed jaws. Besides, its very presence was more than sufficient to cause a panic amongst men and lads, in whom long usage and tradition had bred such a fear of the invader as nothing else material could have done. The shrieking hurricane ; the heavy rolling of our vessel in that tremendous sea, and its consequently great danger to her and to us ; the clatter of things washed from their places by that in-rush of water, many of them large enough

to break a limb, were all alike forgotten in the wild scamper to get out of that finny stranger's reach.

Up rigging, up loose running gear, up stanchions to beams supporting boats, on to deck-houses and the poop, tore men and boys, battered, gasping, and drenched to their skins! Meanwhile the water dashed the shark against the bulwarks and deck fixtures; also swept through the galley (the weather-door having become unfastened) with every roll the vessel made, bringing out saucepans, kettles, coals, our dinner, and steam from the fire that it was speedily quenching. From almost every available place men and lads looked down in what was more, on the part of many of them, a panic of surprise than actual fear.

As for the officers—the third mate was some way up the lee-main-rigging amongst some of the apprentices, but the first and second mates had managed to get up the poop-ladders quick enough to be out of the rush of the water, and for a time there they stood, side-by-side with the “old man” at the poop-forerail, gazing with all the eyes they had, and would have gazed with more if they had possessed more, at that 5-ft. shark as the water banged it from bulwarks to pump-gear and pump-gear to capstan. Probably nothing could have more effectually taken every man's mind from the gale and our general danger than that fish had done. For the moment I do not think that anyone amongst us had a single thought apart from the shark.

Meanwhile, the ship almost rolled her lee-main-yard-arm under water, then up to wind'ard she went again, and over the rail, just foreside the main-

rigging, flopped a second, but a much smaller sea. Still it was quite big enough to take charge of those spacious decks around the main-mast, the pumps, and the booby-hatch, making everything thereabouts into another pandemonium just as they began to assume, except for the vessel's heavy rolling, some semblance of quiet. It was at this point, as the sea swept back to the weather-side of the decks, that the "greenhorn" apprentice—a very tall and thin youth of about seventeen years—who had vacated his refuge on the top of the pump gear, made a dash at one of the iron stanchions that supported the boat-skids immediately over the open quarter-deck. Just as he got a hold on the stanchion the water, with the shark in it, was on him up to his waist.

At that instant the "old man," who was still gazing like one transfixed at the fish, yelled out: "Mind de shark!" The reply from the apprentice was a shriek of fear. And well it might be so, for the shark had struck his long legs as the water swung them out from his holding place—not that there was any real danger of his being bitten. The truth was that the fish itself was apparently much at a loss to know what was happening. He was doubtless so far out of his native element now and then, and getting the worst of it withal, that he had probably lost his bearings entirely and all his presence of mind into the bargain.

However, for charity's sake it was expedient that some one should instantly go to the youth's rescue. So away went the second-mate, the bo'sun, and a couple of men spontaneously. With some dodging

and dexterity they got quickly to him and dragged him, nearly unconscious and partially drowned into the apprentices' half-deck. Then the bo'sun, a big, raw-boned West Countryman, slipped down to the main-deck again. There he seized a capstan bar, watched his opportunity, and, as the shark went by once more in the fast-lessening water and a leeward roll, he brought the heavy end of the bar down on its head with a terrific thud. This was enough to fetch half-a-dozen hands to his side with a rush, every one with his sheath-knife out, and within a couple of minutes that scion of the sailor's mortal and implacable enemy was well-nigh gashed to pieces.

By this time the *Bucclerque* was well-up to the wind—that havoc-making fore-topmast-staysail had been got down and made fast—after which it did not take thirty-odd willing pairs of hands long to put everything “shipshape and Bristol fashion.” Throughout the remainder of the day and up to the end of the first watch we lay there in that condition. Then there was an eight-bell muster of all hands to make sail. At daybreak the gale had sufficiently abated to allow us to put on more canvas and resume our run to the Hoogli, which we reached without any further mishap.

As I have written, the only happening to me on that—my last—visit to Calcutta, was a spell in the hospital on the Maidan, during which the “old man” called three times to see me, and was quite sympathetic and cheerful on each occasion. All the same, however, this kindness was rather contradicted by his making me, and every man in the ship, except the

mates, sign a note-of-hand to pay him two shillings for each rupee that was drawn while we were there—just as “Queers” had done with his men, and with the same result. For when we were paid off in Dundee—after singing “Leave her, Johnny, leave her” in its entirety while mooring the ship to the quay—I produced a letter from a legal friend in Cardiff, showing that such an overcharge was not lawful under any circumstances. Then, but *not till then*, the shipping superintendent said the same thing; wherefore the “old man” inscribed my certificate of discharge with “G” (“Good”) instead of the usual “V.G.” (“Very Good”). Another surprise was that half the wages of both Dobbs and Paddy had been paid to workhouse-authorities for the maintenance of their discarded wives. Some seven years later I met Paddy in Cardiff; and, despite his age and the lapse of time, he was still the same big-mouthed, expectorating, spluttering, tobacco-chewing little old man whom he had been aboard the *Bucclerque*. At first he could not remember me and—perhaps suspecting a land-shark, for I looked little of the sailor—he appeared to recollect no more of the *Bucclerque*; but I jogged his memory with Dobbs and his own sovereign “buttons,” then his “map of Ireland” face spread out like a genial pancake. On arriving at Dundee, the old man had, just before going ashore, cut some ready-made buttons from an old reefer jacket, which he had worn in the cold latitudes, and shown that the stiff part of each one was a sovereign. Such was his method of keeping thieves away.



CHAPTER XI

Miscarried purposes : Shivers reappears : "Dainty Dump-ling" : Gadflies : Tar and a bald pate : Tricking a trickster : Changing officers : Shivers' old influence : The cook, a character : The meanest man alive : A plot : Trouble with "donkey-boys" : "Want to shoot some one" : Stampeded : A Hebe of the bar : Bilking a "donkey-boy" : Dropped by a bottle : The plot discovered : Dog would not bite dog : Mahmud, the captain's "boy" : "*Voman*," some opinions :
A pathetic comedy : Florette's ruse : "*Toujours*."

AT the end of that East Indian voyage I had intended to try again—to get a foot on the road that would lead to my far-away goal—*i.e.* work on shore, and have such regular scholastic training as would eventually obtain me a B.A., and so to the goal itself. The idea did not occur to me that I should remain at sea and while there write of what I saw. Another instance of how near we often are to the touchstone of our desires, when we think it is far off, and try for it by what proves to be the most roundabout, soul-girding, heart-racking, mind-weakening path that is possible. Ah, me, what gods in little we might be!—if there were no environing circumstances, no hidden opposing forces, no errors of humanity in ourselves; in short, if there were no Sophoclean combinations in life.

Instead of this, however, I shipped on a summer-end trip up the Baltic, with the object of increasing

my munitions of war—as money appears to be in all fights to-day—and thus being able to continue through the winter. Then came fate's unkindest cut so far. I was stricken down by rheumatism of a particularly dogged nature; and left, after an initial seven months of pain, a very bowdlerized edition of the original book that was I. ("Initial?" yes, because there were other and longer visitations of the malady. But it is enough for this volume to mention them where they came between my voyages. Such additional matter as is needed concerning those attacks and the things and happenings to which they lead, straight or crookedly, is given in "My Vagabondage.")

Early in the following summer I joined a steam "tramp" that carried the Red Ensign, and a foreign name. In English her appellation would be that of a delicate aquatic flower; so, for the present, she shall be known as the *Water-lily*—not for the irony of the name, so much as to avoid possible trouble, yet keep as near as may be to the truth. Ironically enough to me, she took me straight-way back to the Baltic, where, during the next three months, I recovered much of my lost health. But the strangest part of it all was the reappearance of Shivers. The vessel was "a weekly boat"—i.e. we were paid by the week, found our own provisions, and were kept at work in home ports, instead of being paid-off and lying idle till she sailed again. While we were putting out the deals in Hartlepool, the bo'sun—a tall, lithe, gingery fellow who knew his work well and hated interference—after some days of growing friction with

the mate, gave up his berth, went ashore ; and, on the following night, met the mate and gave him a thorough drubbing. Shivers came in the bo'sun's place—looking exactly the same man as he was when he and I parted company in Calcutta—and soon having his predecessor's cause to wish for a change in chief-officers. But Shivers (who met me with the faintest lifting of his shaggy eyebrows, and as a man to whom nothing on earth or sea was strange) was of a different kind entirely.

As to the mate—well, I am by nature a lover of discipline ; I know its value, its necessity. Yet in the course of the next eight months there were many times when I would have been glad of an opportunity to pitch that mate over the side—with a line fast to him, so that I could have hauled him back, and pitched him over again—and again—and again ; till he thought the end had come, but not I. For I always felt that if I did kill a man for a personal reason, I would have him be a man. There are those who would have spoken of our mate as a diminutive, male-impersonation of Meanness, but that would have given no more than a mere impressionist idea of the man—if the word can be applied to a person of his kind. At the time of his composition Nature must certainly have been in her most parsimonious mood ; yet she was probably just from the bath—if one may judge cause by effect—for his sole virtue was cleanliness, or, at least, it would have been so in any average man. In him, it was carried over the border-line into the realm of vice ; while his calling and surroundings gave it emphasis by making it

seem all the more prominent. Some of the A.B.s spoke of him as "The Laundry Maid"; but the gentle irony of that title did not suit the strenuous ideas of the majority of our stokers. These pale devils of the "tramp's" Hades preferred to use the initial D.s of the name given him by the chief-engineer—"Dainty Dumpling"—the names they added to them being a variety of changes rung on the three words "damned," "dumpling," and "dude." Nor did either respect or fear make them keep these from his ears. Two of them would often contrive to get near him, then make his appearance the subject of their talk—not directly, yet in such a manner that he could not fail to understand their meaning—and use such designations concerning him as best suited their emphatic individualities.

But they were wise in their degree; they never committed this crime of insulting an officer in the presence of a fourth person who would bear witness against them. Whenever he, on these occasions, turned and bade them beware, they fixed on him looks of the most profound astonishment and inquiry; then generally asked him what he meant. If he intimated that he knew what *they* had meant, and—as one in his place naturally would—cautioned them to be more respectful, they would appear even more dumbfounded, and finally ask each other if they had not better call the second-mate to tell the "old man" that the mate had suddenly "got 'em," or that the sun was "takin' effect on 'is billiard ball with the fringe on it"—which meant his head, he being bald, although he was but some thirty-six years of age.

When they did not so add to his exasperation, they did it by silent looks of withering contempt such as would have put active resentment into the heart of any but a veritable eater of pigeons' livers ; meanwhile they would seem as if about to squirm their tobacco-juice on his over-neat apparel, or on his great patriarchal beard—the hairy pride of his life. This was because our first captain, if sufficient evidence had been brought before him, would have punished them merely in the interest of discipline, for the chief-mate owed his berth to the owner.

That he was very short and broad may be taken for granted, but he was not fleshy ; while his lightness of foot and of general movements was almost equal to his spruceness. Had he kept his Piccadilly linen, carefully-folded garments, pomades, and other material signs of the effeminate man for go-ashore occasions there would not have been so much to complain about—even though their wearer and owner was what is termed a seaman. But then, the *Water-lily* was not only a “tramp.” She had been “laid up” eighteen or twenty months, and so dirty and wretched-looking was she that she was scarcely on nodding acquaintance with any other vagrant on the waters. Such of his face as could be seen was of a dark-red, blotchy at times, and always as rough as the back of a crab ; quite two-thirds of it being charitably hidden under the hair which spread so well that one could barely see the colour of his small and very pale-brown eyes. Of course it was no fault of his that his hands were uncommonly large, red, and hairy—one naturally expects a seafarer's hands

to be so—nor that his feet and nose were made on the same generous plan ; but (I write seriously) he certainly might have known better than to think them the acme of perfection, and himself generally a modern Apollo to whom all women should bow down and whom all men should copy. Even this could have been forgiven him had he practised the taste of keeping possession of his ideas on the matter.

However, he did not consider himself a criterion of Nature's best work when elderly Tim Donovan, the one-eyed A.B., dropped the full tar-can on his head—while we lay in Cronstadt on the second trip—just as he had removed his cap to wipe the naked poll it had covered. He always swore that Tim's action was intentional, and done in revenge for his being sent (by the mate) to begin to tar the fore-footrope at ten minutes to six—the hour to cease work. But Tim (and Tim *could* pour out words, great in force as volume, when it pleased him to) was equally as fervent in his declaration that the affair was an accident. Anyway, there was not a soul amongst the engineers, stokers and ourselves who did not enjoy a thoroughly-good laugh over it, to say nothing of the satisfaction felt fore and aft, because it stopped him from going to his proposed shore-dance that night.

The lay-mind will better understand the relative positions of master and mate, as regards the work of a ship, by saying that the former is a kind of superior housekeeper, while the latter is about the equivalent of an upper-housemaid with half-a-dozen charwomen to guide and control. Thus it will be seen that when he, in a sense, had but the beauty of

the middle-aged and hard-living fish-wife, the manners of the gossipy kitchenmaid, and dressed as the mistress herself, he made up for the eye a spectacle that was far from fair and for the tongue a butt that was quite fair. Yet the outer man was only the half of an amazing whole of almost equal proportions. With everything but the adorning of his person he was as stingy as old Dame Freeman, who always begrudged the winds blowing across her patch of lavender unless they blew towards her own house. Even with his clothing he was more careful than a parsimonious old maid. He would have saved the owner's cleansing materials, and let the ship go dirty from sheer hatred to part with them. Then, if he could have kept those articles back, the men would have had to suffer for his miserliness ; that is, in place of caustic soda and scrubbing-brushes they would have had to use old canvas and sand—as in a “windbag.”

Thus his one virtue—which is said to be next to godliness—was contradicted outside of himself. Again, even in himself it was a negative one. It is true that he would rather spend his own money to add to his smartness than go untidy ; but where the thing was possible he would draw on the ship, her stores, or lead a shipmate—anyone above an A.B.—to lay a wager against some conclusion which he secretly knew to be then decided. Hence he had cunning of a kind. But in time this means of money-making became too well-known for his purpose. The last of it was when the cook led him into a trap that cost him a week's wages. It was one afternoon, a few hours before leaving Antwerp, where we had just

discharged a cargo of grain from the Baltic. The mate had spent a considerable time in endeavouring to persuade our elderly, gossip-loving, genial cook to bet on worthless matters, and was turning away when he chanced to say that he wished the man who had bought the sweepings of the hold—a few sacks of loose grain left by the cargo-workers—would fetch his stuff ashore. The other said jokingly that the man had refused to take it at the last minute. Now, “Dainty” knew that the sweepings were already paid for, and he very soon began to talk of a bet on the subject. Quickly the cook did a little mental arithmetic, then offered a month’s wages against a week of the mate’s that the buyer of the grain would not fetch away a shovelful of it. “Dainty” snapped up the offer, and the bet was clenched in the presence of the chief-engineer, who had a laughing-contempt for the mate. Within half an hour from that moment our galley-master had been on shore and bought in the sweepings from their first purchaser, with whom he had made acquaintance on former voyages, then let the captain into his plot, and gained leave for the sacks to lie in the hold till the vessel arrived at Sunderland. There he sold them—at a forced loss of ten shillings, for which he had allowed in his computations, but cleared two pounds out of his bet with our band-box kind of chief-officer.

It was he who would have handed Shivers over to the Russian police, when the curious old man gave that well-deserved castigation to the insulting Cossack. But the summer of his greatness presently suffered an early chill. The principal owner—a

formerly-retired shipmaster, who had acquired his right over the *Water-lily* by the means of an unexpected windfall—came as captain, by taking our excellent and much-respected master as first-mate, reducing “Dainty Dumpling” to second-mate, and discharging the former second one. This was just before our third Baltic trip, at the end of which our new chief-officer left us—to our deep and continued regret. Five weeks had been quite enough for him with the master, whom I will style Captain Middleman, after his two most prominent features, physical and temperamental. Then “Dainty” was preferred again, and in his place there came the worst specimen of a second-mate that it ever fell to my lot to know. Debauched in mind and foul of tongue, a coward and a thief, a creature that crawled to detect his own men at little faults in order to report and magnify them to the master—who had acted well-enough towards us during that final Baltic voyage, perhaps for the purpose of getting us (an easy-going and willing seven hands) out to the Mediterranean with him on a nine-months charter.

As to my friend Shivers—from the first he was to me exactly as he had been in the *Ethelburga*; but on all else forward, the cook alone excepted, he had the same uncanny influence, impression or whatever it was, that had marked him aboard our former vessel. Even the mate, wooden though he was towards everything that lay outside his actual knowledge—which was no more than what may be seen in the foregone sketch of him—would turn away nonplussed in a curious manner and apparently quite

unsure of himself when, as he now and then did in their usual talks as to this or that piece of work, he found Shivers looking down sideways at his hairy face and big, red nose. Blasphemous by nature and fundamentally evil, the second-mate saw, felt, to all appearances, and generally kept his distance. Certain it was that while the chief-officer would now and then argue, in a way, with Shivers (whose former nickname occurred to our shipmates only in the sense that he was "a queer shivery sort of a cuss") on how best to do some particular job, then catch that askant look in the tall, straight old man's eyes and walk away, leaving him to have the work done as he pleased; the other "gentleman of the poop" would never interfere in any way.

One thing that helped to make matters more comfortable for Shivers than they had been in the *Ethelburga* was the fact that his berth-mate—the cook—and he got on well together, which will be seen by-and-bye. As a ship-board character the latter counted for something. He was unusually short and broad, bullet-headed, yet patient to a fault, wise in soups and made-dishes beyond his nautical station; and in some ways wise, too, after the manner of landsmen. But his chief trait was an almost wonderful knowledge, mainly instinctive, of how to keep clear of the rocks and shoals in another person's temperament. That and his respect for holy things was why no embarrassing points arose between him and Shivers. These facts were, I believe, also the reason of their exchanging yarns with each other now and then. Besides, he, too, was taciturn at times, and

Shivers was just the man to leave him alone on such occasions. His pronunciation was an odd mixture of English dialects, all slightly coloured by some years in American craft. Another link between them—not quite an explainable one—was the fact that in early manhood he had sailed as first or second-officer, but I was never really sure whether or not he had passed the former stage.

On the whole there was not much trouble amongst us during the run out to Alexandria ; what did occur was mainly between Merton—one of my watch-mates—and “Ginger,” as we had nicknamed the second-mate, because of the dominating colour in his face and straggling, unkempt beard. This was during a night-watch, as the *Water-lily* was churning out her eight knots per hour along the southern side of the Mediterranean ; and it came near to being serious, for Merton was a bit of a devil when roused, and quite as capable in a mêlée as he was at work. But Ginger’s cowardice allowed it to simmer down. Meanwhile from there to the Egyptian port he tried all the despicable methods he could find to lead Merton into doing something—short of striking him, at which his courage stopped short—that would cause the A.B. to be logged. Happily, however, Merton was on his guard and determined not to be caught, unless it was for giving his gadfly a thorough hiding ; and that, he swore, should not be aboard, where authority would enter the breach in the interests of discipline and Ginger.

We arrived in Alexandria on a Friday afternoon ; and that evening, when Merton, Shivers and I went

to the rail by the fo'c'sle-head, and leaned over to watch some natives quarrelling around a cotton-seed sack close at hand, we saw Ginger on the quay by the after-gangway. He was talking in low tones to a great, raw-boned, half-Arab, half-Nubian, who had a flaming scar from his nose to his left ear. Now and then they cast quick, short glances in our direction, also up at the poop and the gangway near them, and seemed to stop talking whenever a native approached.

"I'll bet a silver dollar to a nickel there's some devil's work going on yonder," presently said Merton, after giving, in a sense, an eye and a half to Ginger, while he had appeared to have both eyes on the natives. He was fond of American phrases, especially in stress or jest.

"Oh, I don't know," I ventured, looking aft, and temporarily in a charitable mood.

At the end of half a minute or so, during which he had kept his askant gaze on Ginger and the half-caste, my watch-mate replied, "I know you don't—no more do I, but I guess I'll bet that dollar all the same."

Merton was just a strong, straight-up-and-down, youngish, steamboat seaman of that day. He was about the medium in height, fair to look at, rather slight of build, intelligent, and with all the evidences of one who had known some schooling. In fact there were times when I thought I detected a faint and subtle kind of sympathy between him and Shivers on this score—or rather from the old man to him, for it was pretty evident generally that Merton (in Shylock's words to Antonio about the "harmless, necessary

cat ") could not abide the bo'sun. Had the situation been otherwise, it was patent to me that Merton would have received much the same treatment from Shivers that I did.

Then the old man, in that quiet, flat note of his, which curiously suggested the low, unhurried quacking of a duck, sprung this upon us.

"Did you know the second-mate can talk to the natives?"

"Talk to the natives?" we echoed.

"Yes. I heard him talking to two, aft there on the main-deck—one soon after we moored and the other just before tea."

"What, that ugly piece of Tyneside coal talk Arabic?—"

"Or French?" I added to Merton's unbelieving and defiant query.

"No, it was not French—I know that," Shivers answered deliberately.

"Then by George Washington, if he talks Arabic he's worse than we thought him!" cried Merton in a suppressed tone, and gave me an emphatic, interrogatory glance.

"A lot," said I, in humorous response to the suggestion that while it would have been a virtue in another man to talk so abstruse a language, it was a crime against nature for Ginger to do so.

Here we were joined by a tall, clean-living north-country stoker (who had been with us up the Baltic) and by Peter, our other watch-mate, a big, lumbering, wooden-headed yet good-natured, animal-sort of Norwegian, as fair of face and hair as a new piece

of sail-cloth, with a slight list forward and to port in his buffalo shoulders, and the look of a Raphael's cherub in his pale-blue eyes. The stoker saw Ginger and the half-caste parting company (as “Dainty” and Captain Middlemean came out of the companion-way on the poop) and remarked on the appositeness of their being together, because of the known character of the one and the evil appearance of the other. Peter looked, showed his simplicity in an expression, and I said in very bad Norse :

“Oh, Pete, d'ère sō elks vérdik !” whereat Merton, the stoker and I laughed, and Shivers looked amused, without smiling ; for the declaration was a stock-phrase amongst us. Then we broke up, each one to his particular bent for the evening, little thinking how near to the truth Merton had been in his quick, intuitive statement as to what had been the subject of talk between Ginger and the half-breed.

On the following evening (as is customary on Saturday-nights in “tramps”) Merton and I went ashore, in a warm twilight which a brilliant moon was making something like day. We made for the nearest gateway in the harbour-railings, which happened to be the furthest from the city, and passed out—to find ourselves almost immediately surrounded by “donkey-boys,” as ugly a looking set of non-descript rascals as could be found from the Sea of Azof to “the Rock,” and no man in search of a pack of parti-coloured devils needed to go further. The half-caste was there, and he began to jostle Merton towards his donkey, saying that it was only a three-piastre ride to the Grand Square. Meanwhile

some of the others were endeavouring to intimidate me on to one of their apathetic animals, a small Egyptian being very solicitous in the matter. By this time a dozen yards or so separated us, so I called out to Merton not to take a donkey. I knew the way, I said, and we would walk. This incensed the half-caste ; who left Merton, crossed over to the group around me, gave me a savage prod with his donkey-stick and hissed :

“ Why you speak him no go ? ”

“ I’ll thundering soon ‘ no go ’ you if you jab me with that stick again ! ” was my answer.

“ What’s the matter ? ” cried Merton.

“ Why these pigs are !——” The word “ pigs ” was too great an insult, even for those gutter-snipes of colour. I had forgotten among what religionists we were. Instantly there was a scuffle. I shouted for Merton, and whipped out a little revolver that I usually carried in such places. Ping ! went a bullet over the heads of the ragged hustlers, who instinctively scattered at the sound. The one-sided street was narrow ; the lamps were far apart, and on the other side reared the blank wall of some warehouse. Against this Merton sprang and placed his back. Being now clear of the scum, I leapt to his side. The momentary scuffling had stirred mischief in both of us, and the quietude of the spot (which had been mainly to blame for the robbery and maltreating of many a seaman) lent help to any devilment.

“ Now,” said I, levelling the pistol and steadily sweeping it across the half-circle of repellent faces before us, “ which of you wants me to ride his

donkey ? . . . Come, speak up, you mongrels of the half-nude—whose donkey am I to ride ? ”

“ Oh, sir,” began the little one, an imp to the rest of his fellows.

“ Well ? ”

“ My donkey berry good, sir. Him run faster—— ”

“ That isn’t what I want to know. I ask who particularly wants me to ride his donkey ?—because for the one that does here’s the smartest passage for him straight to Mahomet that he can have. . . . Now, come along. I want to shoot some one, so who wants me to ride his mule ? ”

“ Sir,” put in a club-footed and sore-eyed item of the scum, smiling, advancing a couple of steps, and thinking apparently that I was jesting, “ my donkey him welly good, and I—— ”

Ping ! again spoke the silvery thing, and I said, “ Get back, you brown brother of Satan.” But I had no need to speak. They, thinking that was I truly opening fire on them, were away like hounds down the otherwise deserted street. Fright had even made them leave their animals.

“ Come along,” said Merton, with a laugh, and turning in the opposite direction we made our way into the city.

From the main-guard we passed on to the Grand Square, and Merton took his first glance at the black, moon and gas-lit, figure of the Prophet in the centre.

“ Here,” said I, “ don’t lose your sight on that. Let’s have a drink.” He agreed, and we entered a side-street ; about fifty yards along which we came to what we sought, passed through the open doorway,

and found a ready ingress to a room facing the empty bar. I was leading ; and scarcely had Merton crossed the threshold behind me, when he was lifted bodily off his feet, and received a great sounding kiss. Then he was set down, and a soft, laughing voice—head and shoulders over him—said :

“ Well, holy Madonna ! who ’spected you here. Sit down—I come to you in a minute,” and as we dropped into the nearest empty seats, she went to the bar singing :

*Elle’ è montata, il sai, lassu montata,
La testa è già.*

“ Who on earth is she ? ” whispered I. “ She’s a stunner ! ”

“ Stunner ! ” was the low but emphatic rejoinder. “ Look at her,” and he leaned aside to gaze around the curtain at the woman chanting her “ Ah me, ’tis strange ! ” behind the low bar. “ Look at her—like a big empress and as full of the devil as he can cram her, with all the help she can give.”

“ Well, where’ve you known her ? ”

“ She used to keep a house off the old quay in Marseilles.”

“ Oh ! ”—Here she re-appeared, served her previously-arrived customers, and was again passing out, when Merton arose.

“ Stop,” said she, one magnificent finger in the air and a wonderful smile on her too-handsome face. “ You sit down. What you say ?—What you do ? ”

“ Oh, nothing, Lucia. How long have you been here ? ”

“T’ree mont’s.—Anna, Anna ! Where you get ? ”
A squatty-figured, broad-faced German girl came from somewhere, and the mistress said, “ Bring wine—bring brandy.” But this was not enough, for she went to get it all herself.

“ What is she ? ” I asked.

“ An Italian—and don’t put your finger on her, or the devil will be to pay—she won’t let any man touch her.” I whistled in astonishment. “ There’ll be no going from here to-night for me,” Merton added, still in great surprise at meeting her.

“ She’s gone on you.”

“ Gone ! No ; but a pal, by thunder ! ” And he told me in a few words how she had one night saved him from being sent to a French prison, by taking him under one arm while, with a cognac bottle in the other hand, she beat off two gendarmes ; then sent him on board in a cab, just as the vessel was going to sea. Her superb figure and smile put an end to the talk. She placed her liquor on the table, bade her subordinate attend to the bar, then sat down and drank with us—now questioning Merton as to his doings during the past year, now a very daughter of conviviality, yet ever with discretion and an eye to her personal interests. The war had brought her there, and hundreds worse than she was.

Towards midnight Merton announced his intention of going on board. She said he was not to leave the house without her permission. His reply that he would was accompanied by a playful production of my pistol, borrowed for the purpose ; whereon she took him in her arms—almost as a mother would take a

boy just breeched—kissed him, put the revolver in her pocket, then replaced him in his chair, to attend to the request of a customer at the bar. While she was so engaged we slipped out, and reached the *Water-lily*.

The secret of Merton's Italian friend was kept between us. On the following night we again stepped ashore together. This time we made for another gate, to escape the "donkey-boys" of the previous evening, only to find ourselves face-to-face with half the same crowd of vagabonds. I reflected that I had no pistol with which to frighten them. We were—by some a little more respectfully—being pressed to take donkeys. To be rid of them and out of devilment, Merton said we would, whispered to me to do as he did; then—by mistake, he afterwards said—he sprang on to the back of the animal belonging to the scarred half-caste. At that moment a party of blue-jackets issued from the harbour premises, mounted the other donkeys, and the whole must needs go skeltering into the city together; nor was a pause made till we all arrived in the Grand Square. Then Merton, seeing the Arabic-Nubian "boy" drop back to speak to a man, sent his beast trotting around a near corner. I, being close by, followed. "Come on!" said he; and we jumped, and ran for Lucia's wine-shop.

The other "boy" was but a stripling, and he remained with the donkeys till his larger fellow re-appeared. This speedily occurred. A few words sufficed, no doubt, to explain the position, and the repellent-looking half-caste came like a kangaroo

after his bilking fares. He must have rounded the corner soon enough to see us enter the doorway, for his long limbs brought him on to Merton's heels just as the latter—after halting a moment to gather breath—was about to enter the side-room. I had dropped on to a chair in the bar, laughing.

With a murderous grab the great, brown hand encircled the back of my watch-mate's neck, and the donkey-stick was lifted to strike. I jumped forward, just as Lucia, on the half-caste's right side, brought a full liquor-bottle down on the fellow's head. Like a collapsing dummy he dropped, and all but the woman looked at him in silence and some fear. (There were only two other customers present, who were friends of hers.) Within two minutes she had ascertained that he was not dead, put out every light, so as to hide her doings, and was carrying his senseless body out into the quiet street.

“That way, that way!” we half-whispered at the door, indicating the opposite direction from where the younger native was waiting with the donkeys around the corner, and up that way she went. In a very short time she was back, panting, and looking like a wonderful Hebe after her exertion; for there was no vice in either her face or eyes. As we helped to light the lamps again, we asked what she had done with the half-caste, for neither of us had any desire to be mixed up in a murder case of that sort.

“Oh, drop him up dere by de ole house,” she answered smilingly, and nodded her head towards where we knew there was a big, tumble-down building.

“ Him come-to, by-an’-bye. You get in dere—keep out sight ” ; and we went into an inner room, followed, at her behest, by her two acquaintances—one of whom was a compatriot of hers and the other a Frenchman. Both of them could speak a little English ; and we made a pleasant quartette, the landlady now and then spending a few minutes with us in the intervals between serving other customers, till near midnight. Then she threw a wrap over her head and accompanied us to the harbour-gates, where she gave me my pistol, and cautioned us to keep in the main streets when we came ashore again.

Congratulating ourselves that we were well-out of what might have been a very unpleasant affair, we fell asleep, and turned-to next morning, to be intensely surprised, just after breakfast, to see the big beauty march up our gangway along with two policemen, and the half-caste with his head in a bandage. To go back a little way, as we soon afterwards learnt from her : Less than an hour before this he had entered the bar of her wine-shop and, no doubt thinking that she was one of his own kidney, blurted out that some one (he appeared not to know who had struck him with the bottle) had prevented him from earning a sovereign by cracking the head of the Englishman—Merton. Having learnt this, and that the second-officer of the Englishman’s boat had offered the bribe, she had called in the police and (by the aid of feminine wiles and such material things as she had at hand) forthwith brought about the present meeting.

Merton and I were on the poop at the time, cleaning

brass-work. Dainty and Ginger were talking near the in-board end of the gangway ; while Shivers, Peter and another A.B. were doing some work a little further forward. So that we all heard her bring Ginger and the half-caste face-to-face, during which the latter swore and swore again that our “ ugly piece of Tyneside coal ” had engaged him to give Merton a severe mauling. Of course, Ginger swore to the contrary ; but we put two and two together and said they were four. It happened that Captain Middlemean had already gone to his agent’s, or somewhere else, so he could not be called into the matter. In the end Lucia—after calling to Merton to know if he would have Ginger prosecuted, and being told that he would square it up in his own way—went down the gangway, followed by her three companions, and we watched them go out of the harbour-premises together.

Throughout that day Ginger kept clear of us ; and not till the *Water-lily* left Alexandria did he quit the safety of his berth except when he was on duty. As soon as evening came, Merton and I made haste to the wine-shop, and there learnt by what arts, &c., she had contrived the denouement, also that we needed no more to go in apprehension of the half-breed or of his fellows—she had seen to that.

From Egypt we steamed in ballast up to Taganrog, where Shivers taught the Russian a lesson in respect, brought a load of grain to Marseilles, and shipped a general cargo for Alexandria. By this time peace between us and the “ after-guard ” was a thing of the past, the mate’s watch—three seasoned steam-

boat sailors, something over thirty years of age each—were even more at variance with him than we, as a body, were with Ginger; because so far he had kept the peace towards me, and because it was not in Peter to turn at all until he had suffered about three times as much as would have made the average Britisher turn mutineer. As for the master—he had made a more complete metamorphosis of himself than what had occurred in Nippit, on the *Henry Martin*. No matter how badly we were treated by the mates (which treatment contained many goading threats of personal violence, but no attempts to carry them out), or how vile the food was, complaints to him were received with only vigorous abuse, further threats of logging, &c. Dog would not bite dog in that case. So we had to grin and bear it all, taking what satisfaction we could out of the fact that neither Dainty nor Ginger would venture on shore after nightfall in harbour.

During this time Shivers (whose quiet sympathy we had in our troubles) and I had fallen into our former habit of dog-watch talks, wherein he treated me to a few more tales of his past life at sea. But there were better to come, for which reason I hold back, for the present at least, what he had already told me.

While we were again in Alexandria, I became friendly with the master's new "boy." He had—merely as a natural sequence—succeeded the one whom Shivers had punished, and I (always trying to learn things) found him to be an interesting fellow. His skin was black with a swarthy blackness. An

ugly, reddish scar marked his neck obliquely. His mouth was wide, lips were thin for one of his colour, cheek-bones very high. In physique he was bony, broad and tall; a "donkey-boy" to-day, to-morrow a captain's "boy"; a common shuffler along the gutter-be-draggled drapery of Alexandrian life. He sat on a rolled tarpaulin in the shadow thrown by the port-bulwarks, his meditative, half-melancholy, half-defiant gaze fixed on those great bare, scarred feet of his. It was a Sunday forenoon, and Captain Middlemean was asleep in his cabin. Mahmud and I had been talking of some of the untoward things of life, we being of similar ages, and of like thoughts at times, especially about that complicated alphabet of which neither of us knew the a b c—woman.

Presently, after a long pause, he muttered bitterly :

"Bismillah! vhat for Allah make dem? . . . Soft. . . Soft all same one ripe tomato; den, bis-s-s."

"What is the matter, Mahmud?" I interrupted, breaking the long-drawn hiss of his favourite word.

"Mattaire?" he echoed, looking up at me. "You know voman?" I nodded, smiling slightly and wondering what was coming. "You *not*!" said he, and spat on the deck in vehemence of feeling. "No, you know nottings of voman—Pish! You pboy—all same one small, green orange. . . . Vooman—you!" he sniffed in ludicrous contempt, tossing his head back with the expression. I looked at him, expectantly, amused, yet uncertain of his drift. "Oh, yes," he added presently, "your modder and sister—you *know voman*—I know, too. You see, I lib in

London some time, and I lib in Marsaiz some time. Yes, you know voman, plenty like I know Mahomet." He patted both his ears, then shut one eye, almost closed the other, and touched it with one finger. This was in explanation of his meaning. Next he nodded emphatically.

"Here, have a cigarette," said I. "You're out of sorts to-day, Mahmud."

He accepted the offer, his mood softening. I made a seat of an upturned bucket opposite, with my back against the hatch-coamings, gave him a light, and asked what had gone amiss with him. His reply was:

"Angel-*debil*, debil-angel. . . . *Vooman*!—If no voman, no vhat you call trouble; no voman, no pleasaire—life all same one piece sand." A half-bred native paused alongside, her naked feet making no noise on the stone quay. She strained her head over the rail to get a peep at the unsuspecting Mahmud, whose voice she had doubtless heard, though perhaps not clearly. She folded her arms on the rail; her pretty chin rested on them, two feet from the back of his head. One finger she uplifted in caution to me. In her fine, roguish eyes there was a saucy twinkle.

"You go to her one time," he continued, pushing his fez further back and fixing a reflective look on the whitish patch in the lighthouse, where an English shell passed through at the bombardment of the city, "yes, one time, and she all same de air when de sun shine soft; you go nodder time—bismillah! she like one cactus spike. You ask her vhat for. Pish! she not can tell you."

He shook the ash angrily from his cigarette, then rolled a rebellious look across my face and towards the Khedive's palace.

"For why Allah make dem?" Still silent, I looked into his eyes, partly wondering what subtle wisdom or pessimism old Nile had blended with his composition. . . . "You Christians make voman big, fine, great, bad—vhat for? . . . Sacre! voman a curse."

"Mahmud," said the one behind him, in a soft voice. As though he had been stung in his rear by a hornet, he leaped up and forward, turning half-around with the action and fixing a hard, reproachful look on her.

"*Vous!*" came witheringly from his big mouth.

"Mahmud," she answered putting out two small, brown hands. "*Ça fait toujours mis? Faire mis! pas toujours?—toujours?—toujours?*" Each repetition of that last word dwelt longer on her tongue—more tenderly, lingeringly, with a greater whimsical appeal than its forerunner. Yet underlying it all there was humour at once delicate, pathetic, and peculiarly feminine. He replied, in angry scorn, that she was the bane of his life, his English being mixed with French, and the two compounded with Arabic, all equally bad. She answered in her former strain, also putting Egyptian words into her broken French. Did his Florette not *always* love him? Could she not have her moods? Was it sinful to be a woman? Allah had made her one—was it sinful? He knew that she always loved him—she knew that he knew it. And

was not Ayésha (Mahomet's favourite wife) witness of this ?

During these remarks of hers, he gave shrugs of impatience, vented monosyllables of disdain, his manner evidencing despair and futility of opposing her talk. Yet the little play went on ; there being no passer-by, aboard or on the quay, to break it in the quiet of that hot Sunday-forenoon.

At length there came a long pause in her address. One brown arm was bent along the rail, showing youth and health, its elbow finely tapered ; the other was outstretched towards him, the paler palm upwards ; her pleading gaze being fastened on his face. Without a word, but giving her a look full of battling emotions, he turned off to the port-alleyway—to the near entrance of which I had retired at the beginning of their talk. He passed me and sat on a low bunker-hatch some three fathoms inside the alleyway.

I turned half-around, leaned against a corner of the engineers' mess-room, and watched the two alternately, they being now unable to see each other.

With head forward on his hands, elbows on his knees, gaze on the deck, he appeared an unprepossessing personification of contemplative misery. She remained some minutes by the rail, then turned away, just as a fruit-seller of her own build came along. They knew each other and began to talk, the *yashmak* and a slight shade of colour in the newcomer's loose upper-drapery being the only apparent difference between the two women, who presently moved off

to a narrow lane dividing huge piles of cotton-seed in sacks.

"Have another smoke, Mahmud," said I, throwing him a second cigarette, which he caught, and lit at the adjacent galley-fire. "What's the cause of the trouble?" I asked sympathetically, when he was again sitting on the hatch.

"*Tiens!* I not know—some odder fellow, I s'pose." His reply was accompanied by a pessimistic shrug of his big shoulders.

"M'm; that's a pity, Mahmud."

"I know not."

"What have you been doing to cause such an unfortunate state of affairs?"

"Nottings. . . . I come to de harbour; I earn money; I gib it to my vife—all same as Frenchman and Englishman. I no beat her. Am dis not right? Let de winds speak. . . . She tink me soft—*le bouffon*—I not. She speak me good in de market—Pish! shall I not tell her in de house de dinnaire am bad? I speak me fair—vhat you call smoodt, to her modder. Shall I for dis touch my fez to her in de street? Bismillah! shall I bend me down to her modder, 'cause my vife am . . . *beauté*? Not!—nevaire! . . . I come 'way to de harbour—she smile, she . . . ah, *doux, mélodieux, joli*." Here his tone gave evidence of relish at the recollection. "I go back—she—*sacre bleu!* Vhat for she not de same all de time? . . . *Tiens!* I go no more!—nevaire! . . . I nevaire b'lieve nodder voman all my lfe—Mahomet kill me if I do!"

The fruit-seller's entering the alleyway put an

end to this. Thinking to have some harmless fun with her I left, presently returned with a handsome carnival mask (got at Marseilles on the previous trip) adorned with a moustache, seriously pretended that I wanted to exchange it for her *yashmak*, and told her that she would look far better in it than in her face-cloth. When I arrived on the scene Mahmud was—in evident sufferance—listening to her cajoleries to buy fruit, and to what we should term open flirtation in a cracked; squeaky voice. Whilst I talked with her, he listened sulkily. At the end of about ten minutes she drew apart, to an opening in the bulkhead between the alleyway and the engine-room, then asked the meaning of something she was pointing at in the latter place. I went to see what she meant and was startled at being requested, in soft, winning tones, to leave her with Mahmud. In a flash the voice gave away her secret. She, his wife, had changed draperies with the fruit-seller, who was then hiding her face with an improvised veil between the piles of cotton-seed.

Obedient to the desire, I left them; but, curious to see how the affair progressed, I entered the galley from the opposite side of the deck, and gained a place where I could hear and see them without their seeing me.

For a little while she carried on the same by-play; he silent or answering sullenly. At length he remarked that she was “like all other women—only in love with one man for a short time, and would hate such a face as his in two days.” In reply she took the mask from the fruit-basket, held it

up and said, still in the assumed voice and in bad French :

“ You are the same as this to me.”

He smiled cynically, that scar and his big mouth added to the half-sneer making his face seem rather frightful in comparison to the mask. She took a Moslem vow that the words were “ the truth of her heart,” in her earnestness forgetting the part she was playing and speaking in her natural voice. Up he sprang and started back from where she had squatted at his feet, leaning fondly the while against his left knee.

“ *Vous !*” he cried.

“ *Oui, Mahmud,*” replied she gently, rising and dropping the *yashmak* ; then, holding up the mask, she declared (with Ayésha again for her witness) that he was still to her as handsome as “ *le masque* ” —that “ love clothed his features like this,” and she held the thing before his face, its fine side towards herself. A brief painful silence ensued. She drew the mask away, dropping it. In the interval a soft expression had settled on his face. One great bony hand was stretched out to her.

“ *Toujours, Florette ?*” said he huskily.

The little woman nestled up to him, murmuring, “ *Oui, toujours, Mahmud, toujours.*” At that moment my glance met hers. I saw a twinkle in her eyes, and went away.

CHAPTER XII

Ginger, a thief : Continued quarrels : Yarning resumed : A "wind-jammer" master : "I liked that woman" : Laying a snare : A fateful promise : Fastening the promise : An east-nor'easter : Making things secure : Mites in the maw of a sea : A providential rope : lashed to a corpse : A new use for brandy, rum and whisky : Tongue-tied : A woman of parts : Misunderstood : Straightened out, in two ways.

THAT afternoon—as Captain Middlemean, being still under the influence of "the evening red and the morning grey," had excused Mahmud from duty—he piloted Merton, the tall, pale stoker and me to the catacombs, Pompey's Pillar, on a short trip up the Mahmoudieh canal, &c. Then, having given a new lease to the felicity of married life by temporarily extracting the peppercorn from its jampot, our swarthy friend returned to his Florette, while we went to Lucia's wine-shop and had some late tea that was half-a-supper.

It was during this spell in Alexandria that Ginger opened fire on me, in a way. The only piece of jewellery that I ever carried to sea, except a watch and chain, I had bought when about to sail on that Mediterranean cruise. It was a gold ring, set with a small diamond as ornament. It had come to me by my buying a pawn-ticket from a man in High Street, Limehouse—not the only transaction that I had made of its kind, but the only one worth making

—and while having my photograph taken just before sailing, I had been vain enough to put the hand that bore the ring on the top of a chair, so that the ring would be seen in the print. And ever after, when looking at the likeness, I felt with Lavater—“How small a thing is man !”

However, Ginger—who had remarked sarcastically, with a grin that turned his half-hidden slit of a mouth into positive ugliness, when seeing the ring on my finger as we went ashore on the Sunday-afternoon—stole it while he was in the fo’c’sle on the Monday-morning, where he had gone with Peter, to the fore-peak, for some cargo-gear. The hatch of the peak was at the fore-end of our paint, tar, tallow, dirty rope and dirtier chain-marked sleeping place; and while Peter was down there searching for the gear, Ginger was seen, by the half-asleep watchman, to take the ring off my bed, where it had rolled from under the pillow. Immediately after dinner, while feeling for my tobacco, &c. (a sailor usually keeps his pipe, matches and tobacco beneath his pillow or under the nearer edge of his bed, unless his bunk chances to be where he can rig up a shelf), I missed the ring, hunted for it, failed to find it, and said so.

Then the watchman (who had been awakened for his midday meal) told of what he had seen. But—as accusing an officer of theft was a serious matter, and he had not lost the article—he was not the man to stand at my side and see the matter through with Ginger. So that all Merton, I, and our shipmates generally, even Shivers (who, persistent Bible-reader that he was, had still enough of the old Adam in him

never to counsel peace unless he first knew the conditions of that particular war) could bring to bear on the watchman was useless. True, he was dragged into the affair; for I soon made it a public one, so far as our crew and a few natives about the deck were concerned. My accusation was direct, hot as that Egyptian midday sun, and foolishly accompanied by a request to Ginger to "come ashore with me." It happened that the engineers were close by, smoking after their dinner. They detested Ginger, as every one knew; and, so far as facial expressions could, they incited me onwards. At Ginger's instance Captain Middlemean put in an appearance. Words were frequent and emphatic. The watchman had then to "speak up," but the matter fizzled out—to crop up again, of course, off and on until some six weeks later, when it came to a head between Ginger and me one night while I was at the wheel.

By this time life aboard the *Water-lily* had become an ever-recurring series of disputes which threatened from day to day to break into sheer mutiny. The food was really bad and stinted so much to the last ounce that, contrary to usual custom, we demanded to see it all weighed out to us, each man regularly taking the duty in turn. As a couple of instances: The Board of Trade scale of provisions allowed each one of us half a pound of flour every other day; but it said nothing about cooking the flour. On all other vessels in which I had sailed the meal was made into a dumpling or a little loaf—the general thing on all craft; but Captain Middlemean had ordered it to be served to us strictly according to the letter, and

we as regularly took it straight to the *weather-rail* and threw it overboard, so that it blew up and over the officer on the bridge—defying both him and the master to punish us for “dumping” what was ours. The scale also allowed each man a pound of biscuits a day; but I rarely sailed with a man who could eat his pound. Up to then the full portion was not served out. Now, however, we demanded it, got it, and took dog-watch occasions, always when the master was on the bridge with the officer of the watch, to throw the uneaten portion at the gulls, or at any other object that caused the biscuits to go overboard.

Another thing, Captain Middlemean had ceased to advance us money on Saturday-nights in harbour, because one of the stokers had come aboard drunk in Alexandria and fallen foul of “The Dumpling”; so Merton and I took to smuggling Swedish matches into Marseilles, in order to make a little money, and we were very successful. Yet, although we seamen were punished in this way, the stokers soon had the privilege restored, because the chief-engineer interceded for them—a common happening which no chief-officer ever imitated. This, again, was a source of chagrin to us and friction between us and the mates.

But to return to Shivers and the cook, who had drifted into the habit of exchanging yarns with each other during the first hour or so of the first watch. At these recitals I, of course, mostly contrived to be present, and one night, as the *Water-lily* went throbbing her slow way through a calm sea, bound north, Shivers began an unusually long story of catching a

shark, on a brig in which he sailed; how they found human bones in its stomach; how the "old man" had the head-bone taken out, cleaned, and nailed up on the poop as a fetish, because the brig had been a hundred and seventy days out from 'Frisco, and was then in the Sargasso Sea; how the "old man" went mad, and guarded the shark-bone with a revolver; and of other awful happenings, till the bone was thrown overboard, and a breeze sprang up and the brig fetched the Western Islands. This story was not finished until the second dog-watch on the following evening; then, after a few comments, the "doctor" said:

"I'll tell you a yarn, an' mebbe you'll not believe what I'm goin' tu tell yu; but it's gospel, all the same. It's now twenty-odd years since——" He struck another match, which flickered and died out, for we were sitting on the after-part of the fore-hatch. A third followed it; his pipe was re-lit, and he began again.

"It's now twenty-odd years since I sailed second-mate o' the *Night Queen*, a steam tramp she was, of fifteen-hundred tons odd. That was soon after I left the States; an' it was my second 'greaser's' * berth under the British flag. She hailed from the port o' London, an' the 'old man,' like his packet, was gittin' up in years fer one goin' tu sea. He'd bin a reg'lar East Indiaman in the old clipper days, yu see, an' had scraped up a tidy little hold full o' rupees. But, bless yu, yu might as well look fer a leak tu stop drinkin', or an old 'shellback' tu put

* "Greaser" is a bye-name for the second-officer of a "tramp."

a hitch on his grumblin', as tu think of him a-settlin' down quietly ashore. W'y, he couldn't live on fresh grub, he couldn't. A weevily biscuit was more welcome tu his old teeth than the best cheesecake as ever came out of a oven. Salt air, the swish-swish against the side, an' the everlastin' change was just life tu him—*life*, it was the breath of his body ; an' fer all he ate it might almost hev bin his food. But he was healthy, an' a bit wiry, fer all that.

“Anyhow, the owners o' the clipper-line, w'ere he'd bin master so long, took it intu the'r heads as he was gittin' a bit frayed-out like ; an' as he couldn't take any hints on the point, they just ups an' kind o' pensions him off, an' puts a younger man in his berth. Well, that raised the old dog's dander pretty much, yu bet. An' what did he du but run straight down on the *Night Queen* an' buy her out. He found her laid up an' fer sale in Millwall Dock ; an'—as he told me these things atween watches at sea—as he couldn't nat'rally count on many more years o' hard graft, he thought he might as well hev both owner's an' cap'n's profits w'ile he was at it.

“I joined him on his fifth trip, an' he took tu me like a shore pig tu wet hash without salt. He'd 'a' made me mate on the second voyage, if I'd had one's ticket. The mates he'd had afore—first an' second alike—was all steamboat men, body an' soul, an' he didn't care a red cent fer a man as couldn't handle square sails. He used tu swear as no steamboat-man 'd ever navigate his way tu Heaven ; it was only 'wind-jammers' as 'd git the'r, he held, an' the square-rigged uns had the best chance. Yu see, he'd

bin in a windbag' all his life, an' I'd never bin in steam afore; that was w'y he gave me the berth—an' my ways was 'wind-jammer' ways, an' so we got on tugether like a fresh-spliced couple.

"Well, he wasn't satisfied with makin' the mate jealous o' me at sea (though I didn't care a ropeyarn fer that, fer he was just a muff at sailorisin', an' as big a galoot at everything else); but every time as we went home—an' that was mostly London, eether tu discharge or load—what must the old chap du but take me tu the house. An', by thunder, it was the finest shore cabin as I'd ever seen a sailor-man hev. It was about fifty fathoms from the river, on a little hill with trees round it, an' a knot or two above Kew Gardens—if yu've ever bin ther'. He was married, he was; an' ship me fer a galoot tumorro', if the wife wasn't as much smarter than the house as a clipper schooner is than a water-logged brig."

The "doctor" stopped again to light his pipe, and I took the opportunity to pass a joke about his being as partial to the wife, apparently, as he was to the old East Indiaman.

"Steady, there youngster," was his reply, in a slightly ominous tone, the while he puffed at his pipe and looked past the burning match and the pipe-bowl at me. "I liked *that* woman; an' though she went back on me in a way, by gosh, I'll never heave-to on that tack. . . . How *he* came tu git her aboard is more than *I* ever found out. But ther' she was, an' what's more she stuck tu her post like a barnacle tu an old tub—leastwise, in a way she did. She was

young—I should say about four or five-an’-twenty, an’ I was about eight-an’-twenty then.

“Well, I told yu she was smart. She was a bit tall, an’ the way she carried her head made me think of a first-class clipper carryin’ a fine house-flag in a full-sail breeze. An’ besides that, she didn’t show the sniff of a bone at any point, an’ yu can bet yur bottom dollar the coon as said she was fat would hev had tu measure yardarms with me. . . . She was soft tu touch, as a sailor’s wife should be. . . .

“Yes, she liked me, that was flat on the chart—any’ow, she made me think it was. Though, course, she didn’t let the ‘old man’ see it—not in that way; but ther’ was times w’en he might ‘a’ done, if he’d bin sharp enough. In that summer after I first went tu the house—that was in the fall—she came a trip with us up the Black Sea here an’ back; an’ the way she mistered me here an’ mistered me ther’, an’ came on the upper bridge w’en I had the first night-watch, made me fear more than enough as the mate would see it an’ split out o’ spite. However, he didn’t split, an’ the cap’n was too blind an’ trustful tu think of it. Not as I took the weather-board o’ the thing. Fer one reason, she held me too well in-stays, fer that—just so far an’ no further, ses she, like. No, siree, she wouldn’t let me make a knot, ‘cept just as she liked. She’d got my sheets in one hand an’ tiller in t’other, yu know; an’ b’lieve me or du t’other thing, I’m hanged if I could eether fill an’ stand off, or gather way an’ beat up tu her. She let me see as she liked me—she just told me as much. Then, she gave me a sort o’ halfpay in smiles an’ soft

words, an' sometimes let me sit close tu her, an' walk close tu her in that big garden, w'en the 'old man' was a-takin' a little watch-below in his chair on the verandah. An' ther', ses she, I must hold off 's long as he lived.

"Well, at that time I'd a sight sooner hev the crumbs as he never missed than sheer off with me hold empty. Besides, w'en I was away from her I couldn't help feelin' as his kindness tu me (fer I'd bin four months out of a berth w'en he took me) ought tu be paid with fair dealin'. But, the Devil!—how could a flesh-an'-blood man think o' such things w'en he was moored alongside a woman like her? I know as it wasn't in me tu steer straight then; an' hang me fer a nigger if I b'lieve any man could, 'nless he'd bin first dipped in Heaven.

"There was another thing as kept me shackled tu her an' the *Night Queen*. The trip afore she went with us tu the Black Sea she asked me tu promise her tu stick tu the 'old man' till he eether stopped ashore or 'signed-off' his life's articles. She as good as said as w'enever he went, she wanted him brought home agin, dead or alive—an' the man as brought him home 'd git all he wanted at her hands; she just wished, she said, tu hev him buried close by. That was one night, w'en she said this, as we walked the lonely road from the station tu the villa, after I'd taken her tu one o' the West End theatres, at the 'old man' askin' me tu: he said as he was tired, an' would be sure tu go tu sleep if he went, an' that 'd spoil her pleasure.

"'Course, I promised; an', well, that was the only

time she ever let me kiss her; an' she did it like a queen givin' a full pension to a hard-fightin' soldier after winnin' her a big battle. Then, afore I'd cooled down—an', by heaven, but that shook me up in the wind—she wanted me tu give her my solemn word as if he died at sea or in any foreign port, no matter what on earth it cost me, I'd bring his corpse home. Tu be sure, she hinted ever so nicely, as she looked straight at the sidewalk, I should hev his berth as a sort o' reward. Well, what could a poor sailor-man du in a corner like that? I remember that kiss; fer just thirty-nine seconds I'd felt how soft she was tu hold, an' I staked me word tu God an' her.

“Well, things went on just as they'd done afore—'nless 'twas as she was a bit kinder at times, smiled a bit sweeter an' oftner, an' dropped stronger hints on the quiet as tu what I should some day enjoy. She certainly put her head closer tu mine than she used tu, w'en we was examinin' charts or plans, or goin' over accounts, on the dinin'-room table; fer he was nuts on being his own clerk an' charterin' master, an' fixin' up the courses at home for the next voyage, as far as he could; an' she was one o' the biggest cautions I ever came ath'ort fer wantin' tu know everything.

“Then the winter came; an' we made a spankin' good rip tu the Canaries, then tu Philadelphi', an' back with grain tu Dunkirk. Fact was, we did so uncommon well out o' the round trip that the 'old man' jumped at a chance tu du it ag'in. So round tu Cardiff we went straight, fer coals, fer the Canaries ag'in.

“But, bless yu, the wife didn't let us slip off ag'in

like that—not she, sirree. She'd insured her freight fer too big a pile not tu look after it well; an' she kept her eye on it, like a Methodist parson on his Sunday-go-tu-meetin' frock-coat. It wasn't her usual run tu join us like that, fer two days only; though I've seen sailors' wives as wouldn't let the'r husbands be in a British port two hours without joinin' em—ay, *an'* continental ports, too, an' be there tu meet 'em at that—'course, I means officers' an' masters' wives.

“Yes, sonny, she was ther', sure as a topsel-yard against a backstay. An' if there was one thing as she hated 'bove another it was coal-dust; 'twas about the same tu her as holy water tu the Devil. Besides, she knew as that Welsh coal-dust stuck like infernal slush. Any'ow, ther' she was. An' as she went up the little step-ladder tu the rail, w'en the 'old man' was takin' her ashore tu see her off from the station, just afore we sailed, she whispered tu me—an' my boots, but yu should 'a' seen her smile then! . . . Ay, she whispered—'Mind, Mr. Benson ('course, meanin' me), mind, bring him back, if anything happens, an' you know what will be yur reward.' An' sling me over the side if the light in her Italian sort o' eyes wasn't enough tu put life intu a male corpse. 'Course, I nodded me head. Tu save me skin I couldn't 'a' done anything else.

“An' w'en her face dropped out o' sight below the rail, as she went back'ards down the long ladder, an' he went first an' held her skirts 'bout her ankles—snakes, it was like the sun a-goin' down on yu in a gale, with yur sticks an' boats gone, an' yur hold

a-fillin' an' yur pumps choked ! Call me the worst liar as ever trod a deck, if I didn't nearly jump the rail after her !

“ But never mind that. We had a fine run tu them thunderin', God-forsaken Canaries, an' as good a one to the States. Fact is, we'd hardly dropped the hook * off No. 6 Elevator at Philidelphi' than orders came aboard tu heave alongside. We—me an' the chief, that is ; we wor pals—yes, we told the 'old man' as he was in fer makin' his fortune right away. That was four-bells in the forenoon-watch, an' we wor creepin' down the Elizabeth river that night, which was three shades blacker 'an the Earl of Hell's waistcoat—beggin' yur pardon, bo'sun.

“ Our gutful o' corn was fer Havre ; an' the way we got through the first half o' that trip was another proof how the Devil'll sometimes help a man tu go nap on a handful o' rags,† lose all, then hang hisself.

“ Any'ow, we got clear o' the bay all right, an' across the banks without runnin' any fishermen down. But w'en we got over the Gulf Stream—my, we met it ! Didn't it blow ! An' it came down on us like a West India squall. It was about two-bells in the mornin', an' the mate's watch on deck. I was as solid asleep as an Eskimo, w'en bang went the top o' my head at the fore part o' me bunk ! I thought fer the minute as me skull was knocked in. But it was pretty thick—er I should hev gone many a time afore now—an' I threw off the blanket an' sat up, with me legs hangin' over the bunk-board. I didn't

* Anchor.

† Cards of low value when playing euchre.

hev the chance tu sit long. I'd hardly put me thoughts on the tack after what was the matter, than she pitched me forrads on to the floor. That was enough—leastwise, 'twas enough fer me, Some fellas'd a wanted more, mebbe; but it's lucky as we're not all gluttons.

"In two minutes I was out on the lower bridge, in me drawers an' stockin's, tu see what the blazes was up. . . . Well, it was a fiend of an east-nor'-easter, with a sea like rollin' rows o' four-story houses; an' if it didn't howl, there isn't a devil in hell as can.

"Course, there was nothing fer it but tu keep her head-on as long as possible; an', as I saw the 'old man' had tumbled out of his bed in the chart-house an' was on the upper bridge with the mate, I cleared off tu me berth ag'in, slipped intu some dry clothes an' me bunk an' tried tu git some more sleep.

"Ther' was no call fer me till the watch was out. Ther' was nothing tu be called fer, 'cause all the men afloat couldn't du more 'an keep her nose tu it, an' two decent A.B.s could du that as well as a dozen. An' ther' wasn't any slackenin' in the breeze eether; 'stead o' that, after the first rush it settled down tu about the same steady tune—yu know, the one as ses, 'Batten down, boys, I've come fer a spell.' An' it had so.

"All that day it piped fer all it was worth; an' every now an' then we wor treated to a blindin', shiverin' squall o' sleet as took the life out o' yu—just same as if yu'd bin ten days in an A1 refrigerator without grub. But the worst of it, the rudder seemed tu git less an' less; any'ow, it got tu

hev less grip on her ; an' now an' then she'd pay off tu port or starboard an' take a green sea over the break o' the fokesel, or in fore-side the waist.

"Two angels in dungerees an' oilskins couldn't hev kept her head-on, an' I don't think as two arch-angels could, eether ; 'nless they'd bin quartermasters afore they went up the last riggin' ; fer the 'old man' an' me, then the mate an' me, tried our level best tu du it, an' failed.

"The consequence was, at noon we'd lost the starboard lifeboat, an' the gig lay smashed on the chocks. We was afraid as the anchors 'd git adrift, er the hatches be started ; so, just after dinner, we sets-tu an' does all we can tu stop anything o' that sort takin' place. 'Course, we had tu be mighty chary how we went about it, an' so we was, yu bet. An' we got it done A 1, an' the fiddley-covers better secured ; but we lost the bo'sun an' one A.B. over it—an' fine chaps both on 'em was. . . . Well, if we was two hands short out of seven, we still had four tu stand turn-an'-turn about, an' one tu spare fer odd jobs. Besides, we felt easier as tu the water gettin' below, an' that was the winnin' card.

"Then night came down on us ; an' just as the mate relieved me tu go down tu the galley fer a dish o' tea an' a biscuit—'cause there was no proper meal tu be had anyw'ere—off she pays tu starboard, a sea comes down on her, an' the port-lifeboat went tu smithereens. Fer my part, I thought as that one'd surely put her on her beam-ends, or send the engine-room skylight in, er some other fine thing ; fer it *was* a sea, *that* was. But up she rolled ag'in an'

shook herself clear. (Yu can bet as it was a good thing fer her an' us as she was tough, an' had bin built w'en boats was built of iron 'stead o' tin at £6 a ton.) W'en she came up tu it ag'in she paid off a couple o' points t'other way an' took a smaller sea over her starboard-bow, then squared her old head tu the gale ag'in. As soon as she was a bit quiet we cleared away the wreckage as well as we could, an' I went an' had a drink o' tea an' a slice o' cold beef an' biscuit.

"It was my first watch that night, an' one as I shall not fergit if I live as long as Noah.

"W'en eight-bells struck I left the chart-house—w'ere the 'old man' had ordered the mate an' me tu spend our spare time with him, 'stead o' goin' down tu our berths under the after-end o' the lower bridge—an' I went straight an' relieved the mate on the flyin'-bridge. Till just after four-bells everything carried on just about the same, 'cept ther' was no more damage done. Then the skipper came up an' asked me what I thought of it. I told him—mighty little. He said as the glass kept steady—a bad sign of us gettin' any alteration afore mornin'.

"Well, he hung about a bit, uneasy like in the middle o' the bridge. I began tu wish him below, out the way, w'en he told me tu git one o' the binnacle-lamps out o' the w'eel-house an' go aft with him tu see if the quarter-w'eel-chains an' the tiller an' that wor all right. I didn't like him goin' potterin' about ther'; fer it was devilish dangerous fer a lively strong man, let alone him—as ought tu hev bin moored alongside o' the wife at home. So I said as I'd go, if he'd stop ther' w'ile I came back; but he'd see

me in kingdom-come first—not as he said that, but he meant it; an' he wouldn't let me an' one o' the men go, eether.

“So away we went—after puttin' the spare hand in my place tu keep a look-out—an' got on tu the poop all right, by the long fore-an'-aft bridge. First, we examined the port-side an' found it workin' A1; then we tackled the starboard, an' wore round to the rudder-head.

“All at once, as he was pokin' his old head under the w'eel-box tu git a better sight o' the tiller, I felt there was something wrong with her; an' just as I straightened up tu look forrad, swish comes a devil of a sea over the port side abaft the bridge. She trembled like a pennant shakin' out in the wind; then away tu starboard she went, an' just then another sea, but a smaller one, came over the break o' the poop.

“I dropped the lamp, yu can bet yur pass tu the everlastin' green fields on that; an' I dropped, too, just w'ere I knew two ring-bolts was in the deck, on the port-side o' the skylight. No shore-shark ever stuck tu a deep-water sailorman just paid off than I did tu them rings. An' all the time the water was swirlin' 'bout me like mad. One minute, I was on me back on the skylight, an' the next on me chest on the deck. First I thought I should drown as I held on, then the water left me till I got a breath o' air; an' the next jiffy it came back, an' bashed me from side tu side, as she rolled an' wallowed in it like a filled porker in a full trough.

“At last she steadied a bit, an' I began tu think o'

the ‘old man,’ w’en, wallop—she dived her head into a big bank, an’ he came bang ag’instant me from the port-side. ‘Hold on tu me, sir,’ ses I. But he only lay there still, just as she lay ditherin’ on an even keel. I let go with one hand an’ grabbed him with it. Holy Mary, but I’d—sorry, bosun—I’d hardly got me arm round him w’en up went her head as if she wanted tu go straight tu Heaven. She thrust her starn fathoms down in it, an’ we was torn away like rags o’ canvas an’ swept off the poop, through the rails an’ down crash on tu the after-hatch—I can feel that soss now, b’lieve me I can. How I kept a hold on him, God in His goodness knows, I don’t.

“The next thing I knew was as we wor in the port-corner o’ the well-deck an’ the poop, an’ as I had me arms round him like a vice. I spoke tu him, but he didn’t answer. Then the water came ag’in, an’ I felt a line in it; ’twas the end o’ the main-gaff tackle, as it happened; an’ as she just then rolled that way an’ sossed us ag’in’ the bulwarks, by the belayin’ pin, I jammed me chest ag’in’ his—him atween me an’ the stanchion w’ere the fall* had got foul—an’ passed it round an’ round us, under our arms, inside the stanchion, an’ hitched it fast.

“Then I must hev lost me senses fer a minute, ’cause I recerlect no more, till I came tu an’ found us lashed, as I’ve said. I was cussedly weak. In a bit I tried tu speak; but, bless yu, I could hardly hear meself. Any’ow, in a while I felt a mite stronger, so I tried a shout tu the bridge—gosh, I might’s

* Rope.

well hev yelled tu the moon. In my condition an' ag'in' that howler, I could du no more than whisper. I saw as 'twasn't a devil a bit o' good tu look ther' fer help, 'nless some one came along just be chance. So I turned me attention tu the 'old man' an' did me best tu rouse him.

"But it was all the same—he was like ice. I began tu think as he'd got a bad crack somew'ere. Besides, all this time my strength was givin' out more an' more. Fact was I was pretty badly knocked about meself, an' every time the cold water came over I nearly fainted ag'in. Then I did du a shout, fer all I was worth; fer the truth broke on me like greased lightnin', as I was lashed tu a dead man.

"Well, yu can put all yur odds on it as that thought put some new life intu me; an' if ther'd bin a mite o' life left in him what I did tu him would hev brought him up in the wind. But ther' wasn't, an' all I did I did tu a corpse.

"I couldn't blind meself to it—he was dead, an' what to do I no more knew than I knew how tu grow meself wings. I tried tu holler, an' found ther' wasn't enough strength in me tu talk. Then I thought o' castin' meself adrift from him, an' creepin' forrad tu the bridge; but as I lifted me hands tu du it, a sea swept over the opposite side, bashed me on the top of him, with me face on his, an' I went off ag'in. W'en I got me senses back it was still dark, an' there seemed no change in anything. I was then altugether too weak tu du a single thing but think, an' not enough strength tu keep that up properly; yet I managed tu bear in mind as I was tu bring him

home ; an' I kept some faint idea o' what me pay was tu be fer the job. . . .

“So the time passed, till some dangerous breakage tu No.2 hatchway had bin repaired, and they came aft—after givin' us both up—an' found me an' the corpse slung tu the stanchion, me insensible o' course, an' him with his back fairly broke, an' his head knocked about. W'en they (the mate an' the engineers, I means) got me able tu speak—that was close on daybreak, an' the weather was finin' away—they wor talkin' 'bout puttin' the body over the side in a piece o' canvas ; but on the strength o' the coldness and the probable shortness o' the rest o' that passage I got 'em tu keep it—the chief backin' me against the mate. Be night the breeze had died down tu a mere nothing, an' the next day the carpenter made a water-tight box, intu which we put the corpse an' poured on tu it all the brandy, rum, an' w'isky as was in the ship ; which was 'nough tu cover it.—I ken show yu wot the newspapers said about it.” (And on the following day he kept his word.)

“Soon as we berthed in Havre, a telegram come from the widow tu send on the body. We did so, an' w'en we arrived in London—which was just a day sooner than we wor expected—I took it on meself tu make a straight course fer the villa above Kew. It was just at tea-time w'en we docked at Millwall, an' I got tu the house 'tween eight an' nine o'clock. 'Course, ther' was a bell tu it, an' I rang it ; an' w'en the girl opened the door I walked bolt in, an' tu the room w'ere I knowed Mrs. Willard—that was her name—gen'rally spent her dog-watches. Well, she was ther' right

enough; yes, she was just ther'; an' blazes! didn't she stare at me w'en I spoke. 'Course, I didn't knock. I'd bin too long at sea tu think o' knockin' at half-open doors. An' as that one wasn't fastened, I just pushed it quietly out o' me way, stepped in on to the carpet, swung it back to its place ag'in, an' said, 'Good evenin'.' If you'd given me all the ships afloat I couldn't hev said anything else at the minute. All the way to the house I'd thought on a lot o' nice things tu say tu her 'bout the loss o' the 'old man,' as a sort o' tellin' her as I wasn't altugether a pig; but hang me if the w'ole parcel of 'em hadn't gone like a shoal o' dolphin afore a shark, as I went from the front-door tu her room. . . .

"So, as I said, I just remarked, careless-like, 'Good evenin'.' Then she lifted her head (she was busy wi' some o' them fancy things, wool, I think, as women is so fond of) an' the way she looked at me was a slight calkerlated tu cure sore eyes at one dose. At first 'twas surprise—just straight, level, batterin'-ram kind o' surprise, then 'twas a sort o' look as would knock some nervous coons back through the door, but 'twas very short, all the same, an' just as I was wonderin' what the devil was the matter with her, it sheered off intu that old smile o' hers as used tu go through me like an east wind through a pair of cotton pyjammers. That tu me was same as the signal on the dock-head w'en the gates are open; so I sailed in; an' she got up tu meet me, lookin' sixty degrees an' a cask o' pork better in her black than she'd ever done in them coloured things—at least, she seemed so tu me. An', Lor' bless you,

but she wasn't a wink different than what she was w'en we left her in Cardiff.

“ Well, I was still a gonner in me tongue, like— couldn't say anything; an' I sat down, as flat as a new top'sel in a calm. But she wasn't; she was full up tu her hatches, and she'd more tu say than a long-winded parson on a special occasion. I'll stake me parchment (not as it's any good tu me nowadays), tu a plug o' 'baccy, if I thought she'd stop *that* night. Get a word in thin-end-on? I don't care if 'twas thin's the Devil's religion, you wouldn't get it in with her just then. I began to think as she'd talk me out o' the house without givin' me a mite of a showin'. First she rattled on 'bout how kind an' trustful he'd bin wi' her, an' I'm sure if the 'old man' had bin ther' he'd 'a' gone nap on her fer what she said. An' how she drew it out! I'd bet the States tu a nickel as the smartest woman on earth never drew a nervous man out as she did that same subject. Then she skimmed over, like, to her present condition, played wi' that fer half an hour, drifted intu her future movements, talked about her dislike tu the mate (who was a gloomy sort o' cuss) and w'ether she should make him skipper or not fer the present, or till I got a master's ticket; an' so on intu smotherin' me wi' thanks fer what I'd done, till I felt first hot, then cold, then hot ag'in, an' didn't know what tu du wi' me hands. Then, 'bout eleven o'clock, she wound the thing up with:

“ ‘ Of course, you know, *you* are tu have the *Night Queen* as soon as ever you pass fer capt'in. That was our bargain, wasn't it? I quite understand as

you was the cause o' Capt'in Willard's body bin brought home; 'though it was battered 'most out o' recognition, yet the purpose was tu have it here at any cost, an' you brought it about. An' I am sure I shall be pleased tu see you capt'in o' the vessel.'

"An' how nice she did say it. Thunder! but 'twas like puttin' iced ointment on a burn. . . . Any'ow, I was flumaxed. I wanted tu tack, or wear round, an' bear down on the main thing; but hang me if I knew any more how tu begin it than a dead cat. An' what was more, she kept on talkin', and driftin' me with her into fresh currents. My silence was no more drag tu her than a jolly-boat tu a liner at full speed. So ther' was nothing fer me tu do but let her run her line out; which she presently seemed tu be doin', fer she wore round ag'in tu the *Night Queen* wi' me fer her master. Then, as she put her helm a'lee fer a minute an' gave me a queer sort o' look, I ups tiller an' steers in with:

" 'But what about t'other pay?'

" 'T'other pay? I don't understand you,' says she, quite gentle like; an' at that I was just flabbergasted. Then she asked me what I meant.

" 'You know,' says I, like a sheep at the wrong gate.

" 'Know what?' says she, with her big eyes beginnin' tu stare me through like a search-light through an old basket.

" 'W'y the—the agreement,' I said; an' she just asked:

" 'What agreement?'

“ ‘ You know,’ says I ag’in, ‘ the agreement fer me tu hev—hev—hev the “ old man’s ” shoes.’

“ ‘ Tu save me neck, I couldn’t say ‘ hev you,’ though it was on me tongue all the time.

“ ‘ W’y,’ said she with another o’ them smiles o’ hers. ‘ W’y, you will have his shoes, won’t you ?—w’en you are capt’in o’ the *Night Queen*.’

“ ‘ But,’ says I, hardly knowin’ what I said. ‘ But I thought I was tu hev you.’

“ ‘ *Me!*’ she cried, an’ the Devil take me, but I thought her eyes’d shoot daggers at me. ‘ *Me!*’ says she ag’in, an’ she jumped tu her feet as if a full-sized hornet had took two mouthful at one bite from somew’ere underneath.

“ ‘ Yes,’ says I, gettin’ up as well, an’ beginnin’ tu feel me tongue a bit more adrift. ‘ Yes; that’s what you gave me tu understand: If I brought him home, I should hev his place, an’ enjoy all his pleasures you said. . . .’

“ ‘ Well, ther’ she stood, ’bout as stiff as if some one hed run a piece o’ jackstay through her from head tu feet, an’ her eyes fixed on me like two blazin’ bull’s-eye lamps; till I said:

“ ‘ Didn’t you want me tu bring him home as a sort o’ test w’ether I was worth you or not ?’

“ ‘ Then she moved, like Lady Macbeth in an up-town New York theatre, back to the table, w’ere she’d been sittin’, an’ the very air of her kept me as dumb as a stuffed goose. Ther’ on the table she took up a letter, came over to me, an’ said, as she ag’in grew pliable-like an’ smiled her worst-best:

“ ‘ This letter, which I was writing tu you w’en

you came in, will tell you all. An' now, as it's so late, you'll excuse me to-night, I know.'

“An' blow me! but afore I knew what she'd done she'd shown me out as polite and nice as Saint Peter would show a bran'-new saint through the golden gates. . . . Any'ow, the noise she made in lockin' and boltin' the door put some new life intu me—and the Lord knows I wanted it terrible bad, fer I was like a stuck pig staring at hisself in a lookin'-glass. Then I shook meself together a bit, an' w'en I stepped out o' the porch an' on tu the grass (the lawn, *they* called it) an' turned to look at the house, I'll be shot if 'twasn't all dark. . . .

“As plain as week-day duff, ther' was nothing fer it but tu git away to a light, an' see what the letter said; besides, a police-officer might come along any minute, fer the road ran close by, an' make it awkward fer me—in them grounds at that time o' night.

“So I got away out on it, an' made me smartest tracks fer the railway station—an' even at that I had tu run tu catch the last train. However, I did catch it—as 'twas movin'; and w'en I'd gathered me wits an' breath a bit, after tumblin' intu a corner, I pulled out that letter an' read it. . . .

“I've a faint kind of idea as I wasn't the only body in that compartment; but I was never dead sure on it afterwards. All I was sure of, after readin' the letter, was the paper in me hand an' the rattle o' the train. . . . Well, what that letter said was just this, only a bit more polite and lengthy: She'd wanted his body brought home so as she could bury

it alongside his maiden-sister, who'd died years afore and left her a snug fortune on condition as this was done; otherwise the money'd go tu charities.

"That was the w'ole business tu the last ropeyarn; an' as the will was paid up tu, I could keep in the ship an' by-an'-bye git intu the dead skipper's sea-boots fer me share in the thing; or go tu blazes if I didn't want the berth, fer I should never hev his shore-shoes.

"I didn't want it—without the other half; so I left, an' here I am—messin' 'bout in a ship's galley, w'en I ought tu be in command. Dizzled . . . Yes, that's wot I was—dizzled, just as clean as if I'd bin some darned, 'longshore galoot, wot couldn't pass a rovin'. But she was worth it—my Sammy on that, sirree. Besides, I'd had a few sips—sort of tastin' o' the banquet,—on'y, I wanted the w'ole gorg'us meal."

CHAPTER XIII

More trouble aboard : Hand-bound victims : A new friend : A pig of parts : Dicky, the dog of sorts : Companions : Shot, unintentionally : I write a story : Hans, the mate : Criticism : Chasing a "jumper" : A shark intervenes : A terrible narrative : The mind of Shivers : Christmas, in a gale : A lost dinner : Fighting under difficulties : An alien's weapon :
A timely stroke.

NOT to trespass more than is really needful on the brief summary that is given in "My Vagabondage" concerning those unhappy months, my fellow A.B.s were disrated one after the other to the log-book level of "ordinary seamen." This reduced their pay from four pounds to two pounds ten shillings a month, *yet left their duties just the same*, during the two or three weeks that each one was "down," for they were all "preferred" again sooner or later. Luckily for me, I could not be punished in that way, because I held a Royal Naval Reserve certificate of the first class; but, on the other hand, I was made to stand the whole of each watch—four hours at a time—at the wheel, when both my watchmates happened to be "down" together. This was on the excuse that an ordinary seaman must not steer the vessel, in case of an accident, in which event the master and owners would be to blame. Yes, quite true—to this extent: Many an O.S. in those days had to take his regular turn at the wheel, the same

as an A.B., which all meant economy to the owners. So far as I can learn the same holds to-day, and will continue to until legislation compels masters to carry efficient men regulated in number according to the tonnage of this vessel.

However, to return to the *Water-lily*. While on shore the rule was to give one day in seven indifferently to God, that the other six might be the more energetically yet complacently devoted to the devil of necessity, with us all days were the latter's. We had no Sunday in the calendar of our punishment. All days were work days, according to the almost sovereign power of a master who, as a man, was unfit to clean the shoes of some of us, and of officers who deserved nothing better than marooning. Thus we went with never a fear of hell, because of what our daily hell aroused in us; and seldom a thought of God, because He appeared wholly to have forgotten us.

As for the intervention of a consul—short of physical attacks on our persons, which none of our gadflies dared attempt (except when Ginger and Dumpling fell foul of poor, inoffensive Peter, on a lonely occasion in the hold, apparently under the delusion that he would not retaliate, and were both so maltreated that they had to shout for help—"Murder!" was their reiterated word; and when Ginger flew at me in a night-watch on the bridge, and gave a spasmodic cry-off within three minutes, while Merton held the wheel for me)—short of these, of absolutely uneatable food, or real shortage (which last was next to impossible for us to prove, though it was, a thousand to one, enacted every day), what

charge had we to put? Ordinarily vile food went for nothing in the indictment. As for disrating, logging here for a pound on any pretence, there for shillings on no pretence, and keeping us everlastingly at work (except for the compulsory hours of sleep) even to doing the same task again and again, denying the privilege of stretching our legs ashore either in Egypt or France, &c.—well, what was all this but the autocrat's "rights in the interest of discipline"? Ye gods of commerce as known in "shipping circles," what were we but "poor sailormen"? And when were such creatures as we treated as humans?—outside a few well-known London and Glasgow firms. True, many an owner and many a master, good enough in their way for the most part, have suffered loss by drunken men and by naturally conscienceless ones; but for every case of that sort there have been thousands on the other side. As an instance: What consul would have said that the master and mate were wrong to keep us on board all Sunday, in Alexandria and in Marseilles, to slack this mooring-line and tighten that one, then slack that and tighten this, with no steam running, and very little rise and fall of tide?

But enough, and to spare, of this for the present. Every puff was not a foul one in the weather of our circumstances. There were lulls and peeps of sunshine between the squalls, and Captain Middlemean was the unintentional cause of one source of this. While we were lying in Marseilles on the third occasion, he (after the ineradicable manner of "windjammer"-masters, of whom he had been one during most

of his years at sea) bought a pig—Denis, that is; for a pig is always Denis on boardship. To annoy us—so we heard and fully believed—he had Denis's sty fixed between the fo'c'sle-doorways and the fore-hatch, where the space was only about six feet wide. Denis was in his early salad-days, and to look at him was to be tantalizingly reminded of apple sauce, green peas, sage and onion stuffing, &c. But such gross, carnivorous thoughts were gone in a week or two, for by that time we had learnt so to love our grunting shipmate that Captain Middlemean, had he known of it, would have had Denis slaughtered out of hand to spite us. Knowing this, we bridled our love with circumspection, thereby keeping it the longer to soften the gloom of our prison-house. As for Denis: how could we, the pariahs of petty tyranny that never relaxed, do other than delight in him? From break of morn to close of dog-watch he was always the same happy little fellow, coming with a grunt of pleasure to the fo'c'sle-doorway whenever we called him, claiming the whole deck from fo'c'sle to poop—and he would have gone on to them had he been able to climb ladders—as his privileged hunting-grounds, and every man but the two mates as his friend. “The whole deck?” Why, every morning after his bath—just before eight-bells—he was a regular visitor to the watch-below, sitting on his haunches, dog fashion, a little way inside the fo'c'sle, getting perquisites of cracker-hash or watery “bergoo,” and glorying in the surplus biscuits which we previously threw over board, meantime the watch ate their breakfast. In fact, he was warmly

welcomed to partake of all we had, and got a share of most things, till one forenoon, during our watch-out, Merton found him in his bunk—which was a lower one, hence Denis's ability to get in there.

After that he was gently encouraged to keep more on deck, and took, instead, to visiting the berth that was shared by Shivers and the cook; this was because the latter would, in forgetfulness, leave the door open whenever he went to the berth, whereat Shivers regularly made one or two apposite remarks. But Denis was never a dirty pig. That was the one thing in him which we could in nowise understand: Where on earth had he learnt to be so clean? For we all knew that the chief trait of his kind was—to be a pig. Has not the epithet passed into a classic phrase merely because of its being so ancient? It is quite within the bounds of probability that Socrates, and particularly the more aristocratic Alcibiades, used the term in reference to Diogenes during the latter's barrel-occupation.

Be that as it may, however, one could honestly apply it to our young Denis. Truth to tell, we had some strong doubts as to his having been born on land, or of his passing more time there than what was needful for transition from his birth-ship to us. Because if he had first seen the light on land, how came he to be so fond of water? How did he always know when the hose was about, and turn-out without calling, and get in the way of the water and have his sluicing, whether Shivers would or no? We, landsmen though we were not—even we knew that such a characterisitic was foreign to those of his ilk

as were unaccustomed to the regular and orderly cleansing of a ship's deck. Moreover, he had about him that which, to us, seemed unmistakably to smack of the deep waterman—*i.e.* there was no irregularity in the matter of his bath. In "tramps" generally the decks may be scrubbed one morning, because rain won't allow painting to be done; then two or three days will go by without a wash-down. But it was not so with us—wet or fine, the scrubbing was done, and young Denis was there at the outset every time.

Again, if he wanted to lie down in the daytime, he did not stretch himself haphazard about the deck, after the fine-weather manner of pigs in brigs and little barques. If he felt inclined for a nap he laid himself down in the scuppers. Shivers and some of the stokers said that this was because he preferred the cool cement, that curved to his round body, in place of the hot plates—for our deck was iron. But we knew that he did this to be out of the way of the watch—that loved him. And what a beauty he was when fresh from his bath! What a fine pale-pinky colour he had! His complexion was qualified to shame that of any other pig that ever trod a ship's deck. And he knew it, too, or at least you would have said so had you seen him, there and then take himself off to the galley—as he generally did, side by side with Dicky—put his two feet on the high step and, in his way (for we all bore witness to his talent in the art of wheedling) coax some tit-bit out of the "doctor."

Now with Dicky matters were different. Dicky was a dog of sorts, owned by Captain Middlemean—

formerly along with a kind of mastiff that had died on our way out from home. But he developed a penchant for rating himself a "fo'c'sle-hand." Now, in any ship afloat this always causes ill-feeling aft. No matter what her flag or social standing may be, when a cabin-hand takes to mingling freely with the forward ones his companions aft look on him with an eye askant. So what did his master do in a fit of pique (afterwards repented, which was a proof that even he was not all inhuman) but give him to a foreman of the lightermen in Marseilles, two days before Denis came aboard. "Chips" (a lumbering Swede, who might have been the elder brother of Peter, physically and mentally) was told to make the transference; and while we looked on with grief, he dropped Dicky into the lighter. The boat was high, and the long drop broke Dick's leg—at least, some of us said it did; and his actions and cries were certainly ground enough for the assertion. Anyway, the man did not want a cripple. So the exile was carried back, carefully tended by his humble friends (us); with the result that when we were away down by Messina, going south again, the rudely-made splints were off, and he was the same dog as before—except that he seldom went aft. However, owing, no doubt, to some unsuspected soft place in his heart (and the worst of men have them), the master let Dicky alone—even while he was greatly annoyed that the dog *would* be with us.

Dicky was a sad dog, yet far from being a sorrowful one; and, unlike Denis, he had a history—as the cook had learnt from the steward and given to us.

He had formerly been owned by Captain Middlemean's brother ; and if crossing and recrossing the Atlantic in a steamboat could have made a sailor of him he would have been a good one, for he was an old hand at that. But as the vessel had been of the vagabond type he, from force of circumstances or from the company he had kept, had taken on much of the same nature. In fact, he was a fall-away—as his history went to show. Although Dicky's former, burly fellow-canine was one that would as lief have had a piece of an A.B.'s leg for dinner as a beef-steak, we were rather sorry when he died ; for we had seen much fun, especially in those pre-trouble days, in the actions of the two dogs. The proud aristocrat had been of much more service to his master than little Dicky, whose greatest possible boast was a variety of breeds. The big canine-German knew this, and he had not only treated his small contemporary with scorn by ineffably ignoring him (which Dicky's lack of pride had prevented him from heeding), he lordly walked off with whatever Dicky had annexed from pantry or galley. In short, he had always taught the artful one lessons in honesty—of Prussian type ; but the latter was too much of a natural scapegrace to learn. True, after an application of ratlin Dicky would do better for a time. Still the Bohemian in him overcame the Puritan, and he again descended to his free-and-easy way of living. Then, as already written, the big fellow died, and Dicky took more and more to our low-caste company. We all know the saw about the Avernus road ; and, with no

soul of his own, he was always the soul of good feeling.

But the best part of the whole thing was the friendship between Dicky and Denis. It is quite true that the former was a coward, for if he smelt a rat he would skip about the place seeming to be on fire to annihilate the thing; but if it appeared and ran, Dicky would run the opposite way—holding up that once broken leg, and whining as if it really needed re-setting. Of course, like all cowards, he tried to hide it. Thus, when he and Denis first met he straightway expressed a hostile opinion. For a moment Denis looked at him, as if measuring his weight, then lowered his head and made a charge. That long snout ploughed under the barker. Dicky had not had time to run, and he went up and came down, as if tossed by a miniature bull. A short coolness ensued. Then began their Damon-like friendship—the co-partnership in poking their noses into tarpots, capsizing paint, filching from the pantry (for Dicky not only taught Denis disreputable doings, he also caused him to cultivate tastes above his station) and nearly drove the old cook mad by stealing from his galley. Certain it was that what Denis could not do, Dicky could and did.

So we fared to and fro across the Mediterranean, till the carrying of sulphuric acid in ill-protected demijohns on the fore-deck confined Denis to his quarters and kept Dicky from going aft so much. Then, owing to one of the huge bottles bursting on the quay in Alexandria and burning a couple of natives, that malpractice was stopped; and our friends got about

again much as before. It was while we were there on this occasion that Merton and I went one night into a café near the Grand Square ; and presently there were words then revolver-shots amongst Greeks and Italians, one result being that an almost spent bullet ricocheted its way into my leg. But a doctor soon took it out, leaving only a hole about an inch and a half deep. This, of course, was the subject of some discussion between Captain Middlemean and me. He would have it that the wound was my fault, and I must leave the vessel in consequence. I maintained the opposite, respectfully defied him to prove his case, refused to go to hospital (and so he paid off and left, contrary to the mutual determination of Merton and I) and was made night-watchman for the remainder of our stay, rather than let me lay-up a few days on board. Well, that ill-wind blew me some good ; for it set me writing, as I sat in the galley at nights, between my irregular walks around the decks to see that all was well. And one night—the last but one before we were away again for Marseilles—Shivers came along, when I thought every man aboard was asleep, saw what I was doing, and asked if the writing was a letter.

“No, it’s about a Dutch mate of whom I learnt some particulars in the Gulf of Mexico,” I answered.

“A story ? ”

“No, facts,” said I, a little piqued in a way by his heedlessness to my first reply.

“Well, a narrative, then ? ” And he sat on the high threshold of the galley doorway, his back towards me, and his manner that of a man whose

thoughts were far away. There were still times when the old shivery feeling came over me again as I stood by him, mostly in the quietnesses of the night; and it suddenly came at that moment, making me move towards the opposite door.

"Yes, a narrative of a sort," I returned, momentarily disliking myself because of those involuntary "creeps."

"Read it," said he, in the minor key of one who spoke by note and without interest.

"Do you mean it?" asked I, with a slight addition of vigour, still rather annoyed at his tone and bearing; yet knowing that all excuses and latitudes were on his side.

"I do. Read it," he replied as before; so I began:

"Oh, a Demon, a Demon, a perfect D——,
A D—— of the uttermost brand was he;
For he fought by day, and he warred by night,
And he did all things with his hot soul's might,
Did the mate of the *Belle of the Sea*.

"Yes, Hans was a direct, yet indirect, exportation from the land of dykes and peculiarly green grass. His proud boast was that he was born on a canal-boat between Schiedam and Rotterdam, christened at Rotterdam, nearly drowned in the Amsterdam dock at the age of thirteen months, and married there on his twenty-first birthday. As a boy he had worked with the Emms trawlers; in his youth he had netted the delicate herring with the men of Scheveningen. At eighteen he had gone out to Java—his first deep-water trip; and after the second

one he had taken to himself a wife—an experiment which, as a kind of lie on his courage, he never had the heart to repeat.

“She—according to what he used to say of her in his quiet moments—was a buxom girl, allowing for her wooden shoon and lack of stays. From the quayside at Amsterdam he took her, where her father sold schnapps and lager, when he was not pulling at or dozing over his lumberesome, bent-stemmed pipe.

“At twenty-five she went with him out to Batavia, to make a fortune at her parent’s trade. Two years passed, and he cursed—as I believe he alone knew how—the inconsistency of woman, and shook his fist at the hull-down coasting schooner, with the skipper of which she had sailed without any official rating. Then he sold the ‘Van Tromp’ liquor-shop, drank the money, and shipped himself before the mast for Calcutta.

“At Garden Reach, while waiting for the tide, he got himself into rather serious trouble by maltreating a coolie, because he considered that the man wished to charge him an anna too much for some mangoes and oranges.

“He had only engaged for the passage; so, when he had paid the ten-rupee fine for expending his physical opinion on the fruitman, he joined McNulty’s boarding-house, just back from the Hourah Bridge. There he had the pleasure of a fight every twenty-four hours. Then he tore Swedish Ada’s best silk skirt and Irish Mary’s new eighteen-rupee cashmere shawl to tatters for preferring men of heavier purses

than his, ran up a month's advance in four days, and finally shipped again under the Red Ensign—to which he steadily remained faithful till one blistering day in a little river that empties itself into the Bay of Campeachy."

"Those are not all facts," came the flat-toned assertion from the galley-doorway.

"But they are, I tell you," was my answer, with more emphasis than before, owing to his uncanny influence having passed away while I read.

"Then where did you get them?"

"From the man himself as he talked?"

"Where?"

For once I was inclined to speak somewhat unusually to my queer friend, instead of which I returned, "In the *Cása de Nóbile* in Vera Cruz."

"Then I don't like the way you have written them."

"What for?"

"Because they don't sound like truth. Your wording gives them something that is not reality—an underlying something. If write you must—and it seems you must—read the Bible more, and such writers as Defoe and Bunyan."

"You're a hard critic," said I.

"All things in truth are hard, and you say that truth is your aim. Try again."

After a pause that was occupied by my wondering at the precision of his remarks in contradiction to his absorbed manner, I resumed:

"At that time he was chief mate of the *Belle of the Sea*, a Liverpool barque of fourteen-hundred tons.

He was a fine seaman, in spite of all his shortcomings ; and for that reason he had been quite a number of years with the ' old man.'

"The *Belle* had gone from the Thames with a hold full of railway plant for Vera Cruz, and had been sent down the coast to put out the second half of it. Now, strong and willing men were in great need on the line then being made across the country, and if they had but a smattering of mechanics they were sure of double the usual high pay. The men of the *Belle* knew this as well as did her mate, but he was too old a sailor to give them a chance of ' jumping her.'

"Then the trouble came—when the ' old man ' was in his bunk, with a slight attack of dysentery and a stronger one of the bottle. It was Saturday afternoon, and the hands forward were as sullen as hungry dogs because of there being no week-end night on shore. The last lighter but one for the day had just dropped astern, to be picked up by the tug-boat, when Hans discovered some pressing use for the carpenter. But all the ' Chips, Chips ! ' that he could shout, fore and aft, down hatchways and fo'c'sle, gave him no satisfaction. Then—meantime uttering curses on an average of two in each five minutes—he sprang here, there, and everywhere until he had soon ascertained that the Swede was not on board. Like a young A.B. after a meal of fresh food, he went over the side into the only lighter left, but the carpenter was not there. The matter needed no further sifting. Hans had talked to him within the past fifteen minutes, and there was nowhere on earth for him to be but in the lighter then being towed towards

the river. Send the second-mate he would not, lest *his* thick head should make a greater muddle of the affair. To get out a boat and man it properly there was not time. Lost a man he never had in that way; and let one go now, with his eyes open and from under his very nose, he would not—if he could prevent that disgrace from falling on him.

“With a few more oaths he leaped into his berth, dropped a revolver in his pocket, and was back in the lighter before any one surmised his purpose. Hans was never a man with any spare politeness, and all he did now was to tell the one in charge of the craft that he was about to borrow his small boat. Within a minute he had cleared the barque’s stern and was pulling for dear life in the wake of the tug and her charge.

“He was not one to lose time and breath by shouting to the vessels ahead. That, he knew, would only declare his purpose, and cause the skipper of the old asthmatical tug to put on more speed—should he be helping the runaway. Owing to the time lost in securing the tow-line, they were not much more than a quarter of a mile from him. The rather heavy ground-swell was going straight for the river’s mouth; it would give more impetus to his match-wood-like skiff than to their lumbering weights, and he swore hard under his breath that he could pull that broken-down tug off the track on any day in the week. All he wished to do was to overtake them before they covered enough of the river to pass ‘Chips’ on shore, and for this he strained his toughened muscles as he had not done for many a long month. Nor did he

once show his face by turning to look at them till the coast-line began to make plain its little things right and left of him."

"A part of what I'm reading now," I interrupted, "I gathered by the use of glasses; and the remainder I had from those who saw it all."

"You were lying close by, then?"

"Yes. And I *knew* Hans."

"Go on."

"Now he jerked his head half-round, snatched a glance at the pursued, and had the satisfaction to note—a fact he had forgotten—that the chased lighter possessed no small boat. This was greatly in his favour, because the man would have to bide and be retaken or swim for the shore. The pleasure Hans found in this matter gave a decided increase to the strength of his red-brown, perspiration-bathed arms. The crowded skiff leaped along almost like a porpoise, and the hands aboard the lighter could no longer hide the fact that they knew why and by whom they were being chased. The one in charge of the craft ran to the bow and called to the tug's skipper to 'Open her out a bit more, because that——"hard-case" mate is at our heels.'

"But the skipper was not in the plot. He had, apparently, been asked to join it, and would have done—only four, paltry, Mexican dollars were too little for the job. The others would sell their hopes of a peaceful thereafter, and tell any number of lies to clench the bargain, for an extra evening in the shanty-hotel up the river; but he—St. Louisite that he was—set a higher price on his

services. Thus, when Hans pulled abreast the lighter and yelled to the tug to ease-down, his request was at once complied with; it would probably have been obeyed as quickly, had he not displayed his pistol in so familiar a manner.

“The mate dropped alongside the cargo-craft, lumbered on board with the revolver in one hand and the painter in the other, ferreted out his man, and bade him take his place at the sculls of the skiff. The Swede was one of the sullen, never-beaten kind; but in the face of those six bullets he went silently over the side and seated himself on the middle thwart of the boat. Though still in a somewhat savage state, Hans was pleased, and he turned to give a shred of his mind to the one who managed the lighter. The vessels were not more than half a cable’s length from the shore, and with the quietness of an eel ‘Chips’ was into the water and breasting it for the bank, when the mate knew what had occurred. At that moment the latter raised his revolver, and it was a wonder that he did not shoot the man out of sheer ill-temper. But he changed his mind; he needed the live man, and he leaped for the skiff. That spring was his last. He missed the gunwale, grabbingly-dropped between the two, and came to the surface some ten fathoms astern. There was an instant’s pause—he seemed to be debating whether to swim after ‘Chips’ or the skiff—then he gave vent to a horrifying yell, his hands shot upward (the pistol still in the right one), and he disappeared for ever. The hardened men on the lighter turned and shuddered; for they knew that he was then in

pieces, and that the sharks were probably fighting for what remained.

“A few minutes later the carpenter struggled up the bank; his confederates waved to him to press on to the quay, and the two craft continued their way up the river.”

I waited, rather expectantly of what I got, namely :

“The latter half is much better than the first. Throw it away and try again.”

I thanked him, and we were silent for some minutes, during which there began one of those long “showers” whereof Alexandria gets its full share in winter, and I knew that there would be less reason for me to go around the decks for a few hours.

Then, in that even-toned, unprefaced way of his, and still sitting with his head, legs and the greater part of his body in the alleyway, his back in my direction, till I, drawn by the fascination of his narrative and the way he told it, edged noiselessly on to the corner of the locker by his door-way, Shivers told me one of the strangest tales of mutiny, murder and the vengeance of fate that ever the seas put into action. It was both the strangest and longest that I heard from him, and easily takes its place at the head of a memorable half-dozen of its kind—in truth, since then I have often wondered if it was not the weird, fateful nature of his tragic experiences that made him the shivery sort of man he was; and have asked myself if he, too, was not daily expecting the appearance of an unassailable witness to some deed in his past life.

The morning came, dull opal-grey, warm and sloppy,

before the story ended. Nor had Shivers once made a break of more than a few seconds, but kept steadily on, riveting me with thrilled, creepy attention (rather blasé though I had grown to be to adventures and experiences of a sort); till when the end did come, and he had risen, straight and silently from the door-sill, and gone striding without noise in his bare feet through the rain, I stood there—seeing him in those terrible and weird happenings whereof he had spoken as taking place in the South Seas many years before then, and knowing him at last for a man who had so much on his mind that he would have been relieved immeasurably to have told it all to a father-confessor, could he have brought himself to believe that a human being had the power to give him absolution. Not that he incriminated himself directly in the recital—no, but I had soon fallen into seeing that such an indictment was the undercurrent of his whole story. Another thing I learnt from it was the fact that he was an experienced navigator, an acquirement which I had never before attributed to him, because no hint of that nature had ever previously escaped him—in fact, it was on this score alone that the cook had rather “crowed” over him at times.

Some minutes after he left me, I shuddered, turned and walked out into the rain and the strengthening daylight, partially to make sure that what I had heard, vividly imagining it all the while, and glad to find myself still in the western harbour of Alexandria. More, it was late in the forenoon before I could so far clear my mind of the tale as to fall asleep. On awaking I remembered that it was only two days

since Shivers had taught that lesson in manners to the captain's "boy," who had come in the place of Mahmud—for the latter had disappeared, rather to my regret, and perhaps owing to a greater rupture with Florette. And I wondered if the native's jibes had aroused those awful doings afresh in the old man's mind. It may be wondered why he, to some extent, took me into his confidence—that I cannot tell. At the time it seemed to me to be the natural thing to do. Since then, in periods of less action and more thought, I have come to the conclusion that the whole thing was just a matter of temperament, and of that mysterious working of uncontrollable circumstances of which life is brimming over, of which it is made first and last, and never repeats, although it sometimes appears to commit plagiarism. Let it be enough to say that his stories were personal only when in privacy with me, and that he never put a further embargo on my tongue than he did in passing me, as I went on duty that evening, when he said, without halting—"You need not repeat that story for a few years," and continued forward to his berth, as though the matter needed no further comment. That was over twenty-five years ago, and the story is still in my locker.

During our next run to the north, Christmas came—and what a Christmas! After some days of a stiffish north-wester and a nasty head-sea, the wind dropped suddenly, veered to the south-west and began to blow really hard. This was late on the afternoon of the 24th, and we were in the thick of it when morning came, about a hundred and fifty

miles west of Candia, and heading for the Straits of Messina. As a start for the day, and a bad omen it proved to be, Tim Donovan (an Irishman, of course, and a big, raw-boned lover of a fight, though a good-enough fellow at heart under ordinary circumstances) had "a bit of a difference" with the mate—in whose watch he was—over the resecuring of a boat which the *Water-lily* had rolled rather loose on the lower-bridge. In a burst of impatience the mate sprang to the work himself, summarily pushing aside Tim, who in getting hurriedly out of the way happened to step heavily on the toes of Hauffmann, a testy German, who was standing close behind Tim. To ease the sudden pain in his foot, Hauffmann gave Tim a quick shove forward. At the same instant the vessel rolled that way, to leeward, and Tim went head-first to the deck, barking his nose on the engine-room skylight and suffering other pain.

Viewed in itself it was a small and in a way a ludicrous affair; but at eight-bells, when the two men went into the fo'c'sle with their breakfast, it came to the front again, ugly side uppermost. Hot words followed, and in a few minutes they were pounding at each other to the best of their ability in that very limited space for such work. Meanwhile the gale roared outside, and the *Water-lily* pitched and rolled in the heavy sea, now giving the advantage to one and now to the other, till presently both were on the floor in the lee-corner hammering and clawing at each other like a pair of wild beasts—if beasts could hammer—with Tim on the top and the German finally trying to get his knife to work, as usual.

It was this last feature of the matter that brought interference from the other men in their watch, the carpenter and Shivers—"Chips" and the bo'sun having been drawn in by the exclamations of the other A.B., a young fellow with plenty of strength, some courage, but no experience. Then a kind of peace was made, and the watch turned to at its breakfast, the ordinary nature of which did the reverse of improving the ill-feeling.

But the real evil of the thing came at noon, when it fell to the lot of Tim and Hauffmann to go to the galley for their watch's dinner—just our usual Sunday-dinner at that time, for it was not in Captain Middlemean's policy to give us a Christmas-dinner.

When they turned away from the galley (where the now regular interchange of biting compliments had taken place between them and the cook) the German was leading the way with the half-bad potatoes and salt beef, Tim being close to his heels with the weak soup and a spotted, pallid pudding that had to do duty for "plum-duff."

Just as they arrived at the lee fore-end of the alley-way, a sheet of spray hissed icily over the side, making Hauffmann draw quickly back, to shelter himself and the beef around the corner of the engineers' mess-room. Being quite close behind him, Tim drew back to avoid a collision. But his movement was not quick enough. Hauffmann's back struck the soup platter, sending some of its scalding contents over his own back and Tim's hands. The consequence was, of course, some equally hot words, well-flavoured with a broad Irish brogue, to the effect that Hauff-

mann was a "blithering fool," and to which he as hotly answered that Tim was something worse.

Then a fresh start was made for the fo'c'sle. But the delay speedily proved to be of fatal importance. No sooner were they well-clear of the deck-house than a great, green wall of a sea broke aboard by the fore-rigging, swept across the deck, and had them both in its wild embrace. In an instant they, the potatoes, the beef, the pudding, and the platters were being carried aft along the lee-side of the deck, as though they were but straws in a small mill stream. In a sense, the scene was comical; in another, it was tragic. As they were swept past the galley-door, now uncertainly on their feet and now at full length in the hurly-burly of the waters, the cook (who, owing to the food-trouble, was friendly with only Shivers and me in our "crowd") had the indiscretion to put his head out of the doorway and ask them why they didn't go for'ard and get their dinners.

From what I afterwards gathered, Tim and Hauffmann just then came to their feet, in the swirl of the lee-scuppers and close together. Their dinner was gone; the "doctor's" remark had no doubt further exasperated them, and they flew at each other, going over with a roll to windward, then down to the scuppers again as the vessel lurched the other way. For a minute or so it was a savage tussle (Peter, a coal-trimmer, and I here came in at the after-end of the alley-way, near enough to see most of the affair), during which neither of the men was really on his feet. Then we saw the steward (who was in the galley, for the purpose of attending to the cabin

dinner, but really watching the fight) suddenly leap out and strike the German's right arm with the poker; at the same time he cried—"You cur!" and we all ran to the spot. Briefly, it was the knife again; the thing lay on the deck, where the steward's blow had caused it to fall, as Hauffmann had taken it from its sheath on his hip. And, as I caught sight of it, I felt that peculiar sensation which most persons experience in the moment of seeing a man stabbed. In the same instant Tim saw it, sprang forward, and gave the German a blow on the jaw that dropped him like a felled ox. This put an end to the matter—for the time being, at least. Hauffmann was rather dazed for hours afterwards; he was cowed in a way, and Captain Middlemean logged them a pound each for "breach of discipline." The sequel happened in Marseilles.

CHAPTER XIV

Shivers tells of a Baltic Christmas : Threatened by ice : " And what a night ! " : Another lost dinner : The " doctor " intervenes : Christmas off the Horn : A farewell peep : " The Children's Bay " : The " doctor's " pleasure : More writing : A castaway : The slowness of time : Dead comrades : A waiting shark : Fighting for prey : Morning and rescue : More of the uncanny influence : A fortunate strain : " Leave her, Johnny, leave her."

ON Boxing Day the gale moderated rapidly (as is the case with most " blows " in the Mediterranean), so that by evening, when we were nearing Sicily, and the smoky top of Etna was discernible against the blue sky, the *Water-lily* was again churning out her nine knots per hour in fair weather. Towards the end of the second dog-watch, I stepped into the berth that Shivers and the cook occupied. The place was just abaft the fo'c'sle; and, as usual, the old man was reading his Bible. But he put the book down at my entrance, and we began to talk of the fight and our exceptional Christmas. This led me to tell the old man of Hilmar the Swede and my Christmas in the *Martha Webster*. When I had finished, he said :

" I have a vivid recollection of a Christmas in the Baltic, too; but happily there was no tragedy in it. We were out from Sunderland, with coals, of course, for Revel or Helsingfors—whichever happened to be the open port at the time. The season had run late

that year ; so there was a chance of our getting into the Gulf of Finland and out again before the ice set in. What further added to our peace of mind in the matter was the general opinion of the Baltic "experts" amongst us—and I was not one at that time—that there would be no ice till the middle of January, if then. That winter was, in fact, expected to be one of the most open ones ever remembered in the Baltic.

"Our run through the Sleeve, past Copenhagen and up into wider waters, was pleasantly done before a westerly breeze that helped greatly to keep the ice away. The wind held on in that quarter, although it was changeable enough in weight. That was why our sanguine predictors were not put to the blush until—well, not until we generally thought ourselves out of the wood. But we had commenced to shout too soon.

"It was on a Sunday-morning, when the change came. The last Saturday-night had been spent ashore in Revel, some aching heads being the result. Another day's work and our packet, a brigantine, would be ready for her deals. Since the previous evening there had been a calm. An hour or so after breakfast, the change came. Down on us, like a strange, invisible knife cutting us to the marrow all over at once, came that herald of the ice—a north-easter. Then there was hurrying to and fro, if you like, all to get away, of course. Steadily it blew. There was no hurry about it, if there was about us. As the ordered march of a ghoulisn fate, with all eternity in which to gain its omnipotent ends, that

breath of the Arctic came about us—smiling, in its chill serenity, at our eager, perspiring, swearing movements. We had gone up the Baltic half-sure of eating our Christmas-puddings on the ‘right little, tight little island.’ Had we formerly held any doubts of that wished-for circumstance, there would have been small disappointment at the prospect of being frozen in—for, after all, the longer the voyage the longer the pay-day.

“But this sudden change stirred in us the old Adam of resentment. Willing slaves to our purpose we tackled the work of discharging the remainder of the coals; for the Finns and Russians refused to touch a shovel on that day, unless they were paid thrice their usual wages. But what were the puny efforts of six men and two boys against that fiendish north-easter? We might as well have worked against the fates themselves. From time to time we were pleasantly informed that the water at the edge of the harbour was freezing—disquieting, goading intelligence. Then came worse information. The ripples, under the pressure of that gentle, forceful breeze, was leaving thin ice on the brigantine’s sides. This was our last warning.

“With the remainder of the coal as ballast, our moorings were slipped. Before the freshening breeze we bore away, our skipper intending to make a call lower down and pick up a load of wood if possible. Evening was down on us before all had been made ‘ship-shape and Bristol fashion.’ At midnight the wind dropped. Four-bells in the middle-watch saw us lying in a calm. When the early morning change

of watches came, we were standing-in for the Swedish coast, close-hauled to an increasing south-wester that rapidly veered to the west-north-west, doubled in strength like a house on fire, and drove our elderly brigantine back up the Gulf at a rate that made Christmas in Cronstadt an alarming probability—if we didn't get frozen up before we got there. Stand up against the breeze she would not; hold her own in it she could not.

“So on we went, that western element in the wind keeping the water liquid. By this alone was our position made tolerable in the matter of cold, for one or two—like myself—were ‘South Spainers.’ In fact, we had shipped in the old craft mainly to get Christmas at home, and a pay-day to spend at it. That was why we would far rather have had some frost, if with an opposite breeze to send us scudding down towards the Sound. For such we prayed, and our prayer was answered. When we were half-way up the Gulf, the weather became squally; the wind variable in quarters, and our conditions on the whole less satisfactory. But on the second day came the wished-for change, a north-easter and presently plenty of it; before which we bore away at the best of the old packet's slow speed.

“It was midnight when we headed downwards. At daybreak the vessel was groaning and surging under a press of reduced canvas, before what was really a half-gale that sent wild sprays aboard, every drop of which became ice almost immediately. Before night—Christmas-Eve it was—had gathered us in its black clutch, a full gale howled at our heels;

and, to make things worse, there was a biting sleet with it.

“And what a night! I think it was the outstanding one of many I’ve known of its kind. For a combination of danger, cold and general discomfort no night ever equalled it within the knowledge of any of us. All this, of course, would have been lessened by one half in a thoroughly sea-worthy craft; but the *James Butterworth* was a long way past that stage. As it was, she strained and lurched her frothy way through the swirling waters. Almost every roller, if you could call them rollers, left us a part of itself, a part that all too quickly froze where it was. The gale shrieked among our rotten running gear, and made the only two sails we dared to carry—a ‘goose-winged’ lower-topsail and the reefed fore-staysail—belly out to bursting point. In that bitter cold we were in momentary dread lest they should carry-away.

“However, morning came at last, and we were still running for all the packet was worth. Instead of the break overhead, for which we had hoped, the sky was a regular dull, miserable grey, and the horizon astern was sullen and fierce. This was the day we had looked forward to spending under the holly and mistletoe in England. But the weather was insufficient to draw our attention from the vessel wherein we found an uncertain abiding-place. Of course, we had been at the pumps since long before daylight came.

“And what a sight the old packet was! To our eyes how outrageously forlorn and indicative of hard work; to a landsman’s, how miserable and suggestive

of death in that wild swirl of frothing seas ! Wherever we looked, within twenty to thirty feet of the deck, there were thin sheets or pendants of ice. On the decks, expecially where we had not chanced to tread much during the night, that coating enemy was some inches thick ; and from the rail to three or four feet below the water's edge there was a clogging jacket of white, which impeded the vessel's movements and grew thicker with every knot she made.

“ Our ‘ Christians Awake ’ was a fervent wish for better weather, accompanied by some pretty open growling and crude opinions as to what we were experiencing. Rags of canvas here and there pattered wildly in the wind. The frayed ends of broken halyards, lines and sheets swung about in all directions, till we thought that we should never get the old wreck even passably decent again.”

Eight-bells sounded above, calling my watch on deck ; but, as I was a free man for the next two hours, I remained quiet—not even answering the cook, who came in at the moment and said, “ interrogatively,” “ Yarnin’ ag’in ? ”

Without a pause, just as he always did in a case of unimportant interruption, Shivers continued :

“ Breakfast—well, certainly, we had something to eat, now and then, in the intervals of repairing damages alow and aloft. A night-sea had swept the galley out clean ; so the cook made us some coffee on the cabin fire, and we had ‘ crackers ’ and cold, boiled Australian beef * with it. But by ten

* Almost any other seaman afloat at that time would have said ‘ Harriet Lane,’ the sailor’s name for Australian boiled beef.

o'clock or so the caboose was once more habitable to a sea-going cook. Of course, the sea that cleaned the place out took away most of the utensils, and we had to 'hum' around for something to cook in. A couple of large paint-drums were cleaned out, for saucepans. In one the cook made soup and I don't know what else, while he boiled the plum-pudding in the other one, both of them being lashed on the stove with wire.

"Yet, however much we had earned it, our Christmas-dinner was fated to be other than what we had wished for. Just before two-bells in the afternoon-watch, and about half an hour from dishing-up time, our ordinary seaman was at the wheel—the 'old man' had put him there while we were all engaged in a heavy piece of work forward. Somehow or other, he let the brigantine range to a couple of points, and a big sea hit her under the starboard-counter. Up she came, naturally. One sweep put her almost broadside-on, and over the rail rolled a green wall about six feet deep, and at least ten or a dozen feet thick. It sent in the weather-door of the galley like a piece of match-boxing; and out of the opposite side came the cook, a volume of steam and a cataract of water. What else came out was in the water; in fact, what we could see of the cook was his head, or an arm, or a leg now and then.

"The last seen of our Christmas-pudding was a glimpse which the mate got of it as it went through a hole in the lee-bulwarks. The seven-pound lump of 'salt horse,' with which we were to have fortified ourselves, we afterwards found jammed under the

forward pigsty. What was a lot worse, though, that broach-to took away our foremast, gave the packet a bad leak, and it was a blessing that it did not take one of us.

“Before the gale we drifted, pumping and hoping, mending breakages as best we could, and nibbling ‘crackers’ and tinned beef as often as things would let us. This went on till the following morning, when the wind began to drop. At noon we fell in with a Swedish steamer, which dragged us into Malmo, where we spent the New Year as happily as if nothing had happened.” . . .

“Umph,” was the “doctor’s” break on the silence, he puffing at his pipe and gazing away up at the fore-truck. . . . “Can’t spin yarns fer sour apples.” He lit his pipe while we watched him, then he grunted :

“Christmuses ! W’y, yu talks about yur Christmuses as if they was experiences. . . . Yu should spend one like I spent. . . . Ah, that was a Christmus, *that* was.” . . . The bo’sun and I exchanged significant glances. . . .

“Yu talk about yur Christmuses in the Baltic, this Medit’ran’an an’ that sort o’ place ; but spend one off the Horn, same as we did, then yu’ll know what a Christmus afloat is—fer I’ll be hanged if yu seem to now !” . . .

“Was it a particularly jolly affair, then ?” I asked smilingly and in a tone to set him off again. I could see that the “doctor” was not in one of his usual good moods, and was well aware that he would probably talk himself into one, if we only gave him line enough. As for the yarn—well, we would put

up with that for the sake of "shipmatiness"; my only fear was that I should be called aft before it was finished.

"Well, no; 't warn't just the best sort o' Christmus tu spend, an' 't warn't exactly a merry one; it had its drawbacks, its cumshorts, true enough; but all the same fer that it was a Christmus tu remember. An' I've seen worse, an' better—leastwise, I've seen sum as wor a darned sight more miserable tu me." He made another pause, this time to re-light his pipe, which he found to be almost empty.

"Where was it you said you spent that Christmas?" I inquired, as he pulled at the pipe.

"Off the Horn, in sum o' the most cussed weather as ever was let loose down south," he replied, the while he began to cut a pipeful of tobacco from a quarter-pound, black plug. "It was like this, you see, we war homeward-bound from Callao, in the *Henry Hudson*, a barque o' 730 ton net. She was old, that's a fact; but she was good—better than her owners, a cask o' pork better; an' I was bo'sun—oh, yes, I 'a' bin bo'sun, too.

"We wasn't a bad crowd—long way from it; and our 'old man' was just about the fatherliest master as ever set a course, that is when men behaved their-selves. 'T warn't oft as he took a hand in things, 'cept navigatin' the barque; but when he did an' said as a thing had tu be done just-so-like—well, 't warn't no manner o' use tryin' tu do it any uther. He was a widower, he was—buried his wife just afore we sailed on that voy'ge; and we had his little girl with us, Nancy—only one he had, about seven; an'

you talk o' lovin' a little un at sea—why, there wasn't a man forrad as wouldn't 'a gone straight tu the bottom locker fer her. She was a reg'lar sun-beam, she was; an' as bonny an' as nice as a piece o' toast after a long passage on bad grub. You should 'a seen the way the mate doted on 'the little lady'!—that's what we called her. He was about fifty an' had no childer.

“Then we had two little boys, passengers—fine little chaps. One was eight, an' t'other nine, about; an' we war takin' 'em to the'r gran'father in Bristol. Well, when we left Callao we knew as we'd be somewhere about the Horn at Christmus; so what 'd we do—all quiet-like 'mong ourselves forrad—we got a little tree, as much like a Christmus-tree as we could get, an' a lot o' little things tu put on it. We made a tarpaulin' muster tu get the whole bag o' tricks, an' we gave three dollars to a gard'ner fer advice an' things tu keep that tree alive.” . . .

“And how did it all work out?” I asked, breaking in on his contemplation.

“Work out?” he echoed. “Why, like this. We had a pretty fine run down tu the Magellan Straits, then we got it. I've bin round the Horn just twenty-four times, an' I've never had a worse doin' than that was, an' I never wants another like it. We met a reg'lar stiff south-easter as came on gradually; an' when we should hev bin round the Horn an' goin' up intu fine weather we was away days down intu the Pacific. Then the breeze dropped away ag'in, an' up we came, nearly tu the Horn. But we warn't tu get round then. A nor'-easter got up an' sent us

away down ag'in. We lost the mainsel an' the fore-topsel. Then we began tu see as if the wind didn't drop an' give us a chance we shouldn't be up tu the Horn ag'in that side o' Christmus. An' all the time them three poor little uns was shut up in the cabin; an' we war mighty troubled about keeping that tree alive. Fact was, we asked the mate that oft how far down south we was that we had tu let him intu the secret; but he was straight, he was, an' he didn't tell the 'old man' a word. . . .

"It was just heart-breaking tu us. Don't fancy as any one in the crowd had prayed for the last twenty years afore then, but every man was prayin' all day an' all night then, watch-an'-watch about like, fer fine weather fer the children's Christmus. . . . But, no, we didn't get it," and he shook his sparsely-covered head in sorrowful remembrance. "'Stead o' that, the gale held on. Two big green seas came aboard; the first one smashed the port-bulwarks from the bow to the waist an' the carpenter's shop an' the galley; the cook said he didn't care a ropeyarn about his caboose goin', on'y he wouldn't have a proper fire tu boil the little uns' Christmus puddin' by. Then the next big sea gave the barque such a shakin' that she sprung her foremast about ten feet abuve the deck."

He struck another match.

"Seems tu me, yu know, as sumtimes even the children o' Heaven doesn't quite get their own. . . . There we lay two blessed days, under a goose-winged main-topsel an' a rag o' fore-topmast-staysel, an' didn't think hardly as we should ever see the land

ag'in; an' the poor 'little lady,' our sunbeam, an' her little chums shut up in the cabin wi' the skylight battened down an' them not a spark o' daylight all the time; an' the wind howlin' like devils an' the sea runnin' half-mast high. That was when the 'old man' began tu be mighty glum. He didn't leave the deck, 'cept tu take a peep at the kiddies now an' then, all them two mortal days; an' every time he cum on deck ag'in he told us all what they was doin' an' how they war takin' it an' what they said. Then, in the afternoon o' the second day, we all took a peep, cheerful-like an' jolly, 'cause it was touch-an'-go whether we seed another daylight or not. We'd had to take to the pumps, you see, an' keep at 'em.

"Well, that was Christmus-Eve, that was. So when we'd all bin tu the cabin, one at once, we said as we must tell the 'old man' about that tree an' the nick-nacks an' that; an' I war picked tu do the tellin'. . . . It was a hard job, toughest I ever had, but I got through it. Then you should a' seen his face—it was like seein' a bit o' blue after a seven days' blow. An' he up at once an' he said as he didn't think but that we should get out of it all right; he didn't believe as the Almighty would send a ship tu the bottom wi' three little kiddies an' their foreign Christmus-tree an' them not seein' it or knowin' of it. More'n that, he said as he'd go straight intu them, an' 'reckon as there was sumthing wrong wi' the calendar, an' that Christmus-Day was still a week or more away; then they should hev their Christmus-Day an' tree an' puddin' an' all the rest when the

weather fined. So he did as he’d said he would; an’ when we saw him cum on deck ag’in—why, he was another man.

“An’, true enough, the good Lord wouldn’t let us go down wi’ the little uns an’ the’r things. That night it began to fine away, so when mornin’ came we could put on a bit more canvas. But we warn’t out on it—not by a long way. For ten whole days the wind chopped an’ changed, an’ blew hard an’ got fine again, till we hardly knew where we was. An’ all that time the little uns was told as we couldn’t tell when Christmus-Day would be till we got near the land. Besides, the tree began to look as if it was peggin’ out, an’ that would spoil everything. So the ‘old man’ took a look at it, an’ said it wanted more light an’ air, an’ he told off a man in each watch to stand by it fer an hour off an’ on under the lee o’ the deck-house, so that it’d get the wind an’ the sun, an’ be out o’ the sprays.

“Then, in the first dog-watch o’ that ninth day it was, we got a fine, steady, slanting westerly wind; an’ up she went—the old barque, I mean—for all that we could put on her, ’cept fer that gammy fore-stick. An’ two days later we sighted Terra del Fu’ga—that’s the Horn, you know—t’ords evening, it was, an’ the weather finin’ all the time. . . .

“Well, we was close in under the land, on the east side, when mornin’ came. An’ what a blessed mornin’ it was! To look at it, you wouldn’t think as it could blow more’n a four-knot breeze tu save its life at any time. That was the old Twelfth Day, said the ‘old man,’ an’ it should be Christ’s Day

ag'in for the children's sakes. An' there an' then he sailed us straight intu a little bay, quite handy. There was no name for it, the mate said, so we called it 'Children's Bay'; an' we put the anchor down—ninety-five fathoms o' chain it took—an' while we fished the fore-stick where it was sprung, an' cobbled up the bulwarks an' the galley, the little uns made the'rselves merry about that Christmus-tree, which sum on us had fixed up as we sailed intu the bay. An' they had their pudden' an' nuts an' oranges an' all the rest of it, an' they didn't know as it wasn't the right day after all."

There was no denying the fact—the "doctor" had scored, and both Shivers and I readily admitted the truth, when the pause was broken that followed his last words. That he was proud of his tale, proud of having "gone one better" in such fine style, goes without saying; for he had his vanities, like most men, although they did not cover soups, gravies and made-dishes—the things he could really do. But his pride and pleasure were most seen on the following morning when I (just as Stromboli passed astern and the *Water-lily* headed for the Straits of Bonifacio) gave him a copy of these lines:

So we fetched her up in the "Children's Bay" on that old Twelfth
morning fine,
On that old Twelfth morning fine, my lads, on that old Twelfth
morning fine;
At just two-bells in the forenoon-watch, when the sun was shining
bright,
With her fore-stick sprung above the decks, and the old cook's "duff"
alight;
And the little ones gay around their tree, though the decks were a
"hard case" sight;

We fetched her up in the "Children's Bay,"
 And spent the merriest old Twelfth Day
 That ever was spent afloat, my lads, that ever was spent afloat !

Like many scores of other lines, they had come into existence as I walked the fo'c'sle-head, keeping my turn on the look-out, from ten o'clock to twelve on the previous night. I gave them to him as I called at the galley-doorway for our breakfast, at eight-bells. It was a "cracker-hash" morning, and scarcely had we given the larger part of the vile stuff to Denis, when the "doctor" came forward, his broad, elderly, stubbly, kindish face beaming with joy. He walked straight into the fo'c'sle and disclosed, from a piece of paper under his apron, four "fish-balls"; three he gave to us, took the other to Shivers, then came back to tell us that they were in return for "that bit o' song." He took it as the greatest compliment that could have been paid to him; and, at the risk of discovery and a "wiggling," he had robbed the cabin-breakfast of a rissole each for the bo'sun and the members of my watch—with real regrets that "in such a starved old hooker" he could not give us anything better.

While we were in Marseilles on that occasion Hauffmann and Tim Donovan met in a wine-shop in that devil's quarter on the slope west of the old harbour; the result being that when we steamed south again, we left the German in hospital and Tim in prison. The new hands were an Italian and a Maltese—two skulking, vindictive fellows who made Dainty Dumpling tremble many a time; so that he gained nothing by the exchange.

As I had been made night-watchman, in Tim's place, because of that shot in my leg, I was again told off to take the duty, as had been the case in Marseilles. This gave me ample time to write down the tales told by Shivers and the cook in my hearing, and, while these were fresh in recollection, to catch much of the two men's separate manners, phrases, &c. I was busy at this occupation in the galley, at about twelve o'clock one night, when, on chancing to lift my head, I received a slight shock by seeing Shivers standing almost in the doorway on the starboard side. I am not quite sure, but to the best of my remembrance his mere presence had rather disturbed me. At any rate instantly on catching sight of him I knew that I had felt the nearness of something unusual. He inquired as to what I was doing; I told him, and he asked for extracts, in order to ascertain how faithful my work was. So I read him some, and then he—sitting on the door-sill as before—said he would tell me a story which, in other words, had been told to him by the man who had gone through the thing. In itself this was so unusual on his part that it aroused new interest in me. So, I at once prepared myself to listen; and, for certain reasons, I afterwards concluded that he was himself the man of whom he talked in this manner:

“Greasily heaved the sub-tropical swell, just enough to give an irregular cant to the raft, over which no merciful breath of heaven had blown for two days. Nor had a drop of cooling rain fallen during seven times that number of days to check the

stifling heat that lay on the face of the waters like an imperceptible blanket from a hot oven. Westward went the great diurnal ball, pitiless as a loveless mother, and growing red. From the raft to the horizon, the compass around, it was one long stretch of the blue, oily, still solitudes of God ; cupped-in by the fainter blue to blue-grey overhead—to that one poor, wakeful soul on the raft it was a prison so absolutely perfect in its simple essentials and so appalling in its oppressiveness that the brain of man could not conceive its equal.

“ Since the break of dawn on the previous day that animal had floated around within the reach of a boat-hook —indomitable in its ghastly purpose, devilish in its silent ferocity, maddening in its horrible coolness and proximity. Now on this side of the raft, then on the other, it had basked about, its dorsal fin protruding above the smooth surface of the idle water. At times it had turned partially on its back and opened and shut those frightful jaws lazily. Once on such an occasion the man had exerted himself to throw a broken pot at the toothed-grave that gaped so demon-like, so nonchalantly at him, not more than a couple of feet below the surface, as if—it was too horrible. Yet that remnant of the drinking-vessel had dropped from his nerveless hand owing to a lack of sufficient strength to heave the thing two or three fathoms.

“ Now the beast itself was out of sight, but that great, damnably-suggestive fin, with its spiked tip, was quite still, barely more than an arm’s reach from the raft on the shadow-side. It seemed to know

that it was in no danger of hurtful molestation. Long waiting in unassailed peace had given it the courage of honesty. . . .

“The man turned his dim eyes from that basilisk object, and groaningly-buried his face on the sunny side of the empty water-cask. Had he possessed a spear or a harpoon, and the strength to use it, he could easily have driven the thing a foot deep in the carcass of that brain-burning creature in the shadowed water there.

“Meanwhile, the foul thing—a real, white ‘man-eater,’ as the survivor saw, almost near enough to touch—kept up its already three-days-long wait for what death was slowly giving to its ghoulish patience.

“Another hour of the afternoon dragged by, lessening the direct heat, yet not taking that gasping sense out of the atmosphere. The shark made a careless movement to the sunnier side of the raft. On his way there he passed under the craft, that did duty for boats which a heavy sea had smashed beyond repair, early in the gale that had finally ended the old barque’s last voyage. Believing that he had felt the bone-tipped fin touch the open-planked partition between him and it, the man shuddered until what little strength he had left was again put to the test of attempting some retaliation. He gained an upright posture, steadying himself by the cask and the flagpole-mast, just in time to see the tip of the fish-devil’s nose poking some inches almost over the edge of the raft. The sight chilled him afresh, so that he sank down again, the twentieth time suffering a fancied mangling between those triple-toothed jaws,

through which some of his fellow-castaways had probably passed. That chance conjecture mercifully took his mind from the present.

“He had been a fine, strong sort of man, hale in wind and limb and head, and well-living, too, for his kind. It was these facts that he had to thank for his being the last of the seven who put off from the barque when she was settling down, under rags and splinters, after the gale that had shrieked her death-song. He, the mate, had taken charge of one of their two rafts. The previous loss of the skipper had put the other raft into the hands of the bo’sun. More than two weeks ago they had drifted apart—the only natural conclusion. The probable whereabouts of his former ship-companions the mate could not tell; he did not attempt to guess. Irrespective of will, his thoughts were individualizing his late mates of the raft. Each one of them was in turn and mechanically reviewed; each one, up to his dying, the manner of it (in most cases evidencing the man’s true self), and his being put forth. Five of them had gone, beginning with ‘the Growler,’ a lean and consumptive A.B. from the Tyne, whose disease-acquired nature peeped through the real one almost in the moment of dissolution, when he interrupted a terse and broken eulogy on the mate’s devotion to grumble gaspingly at the latter for ‘not lettin’ him die without the sun gettin’ straight at his face.’ ‘A good seaman aloft, and smart at a job,’ was the mate’s sub-conscious remark; ‘but we never got on well together.’ Then there was the lad, a bright-eyed, cheery specimen of—— Splash, splash! It was only

that too-patient devil in the sunlit water there, thrashing the surface with his tail to break the ennui of the occasion, or perhaps jealously to bring back a wandering attention, for it is one of the articles of a 'windjammer's' faith in things general that sharks have some supernatural powers where the ship-board births and deaths of humans are concerned.

"But, at the cost of a big effort, the mate shook off the curse of his enemy's presence. . . . Ah, yes, it was the lad he was thinking of, the good-hearted, mischievous youngster with a mortal antipathy to work in any kind of fine weather, to whose widowed mother he (the survivor) had promised many rare and unsailor-like things in the matter of care of the object of her solicitations. Though why her boy wanted to go to sea she could not understand; as neither his father nor grandfathers, nor uncles, so far as she knew, had shown any fondness for so awful a life as that. And, as God knew, he had done his best, so far as a sailorman might, to fulfil those promises. It was a fine thing to feel, when Death was on the yard in readiness to bunt up the sail that had hung hard and fast to its unbroken ropes throughout the gale—at such a time it was a fine thing to feel that a poor mother was not being left to think, on the hard shore, that her boy had been allowed to go where he was uncared for. He had been a bonny lad. He died in his sleep, when his beauty was gone, at one lovely and symbolical dawn; and the thirty-six-year-old mate had felt a torn heart for some days after the young body had slid gently over the side of the raft. . . . Then there was Micky—Mike, the

real, Cork Irishman, the well-intentioned blunderer, whose hand was against no man ; the uncomplaining butt of all, at all times cheerful, at most times simple, at others a bit suspicious ; a sort of godsend amongst the men when things were going awkwardly with the weather and in matters aloft. Micky had passed away with one of your Falstaffian babbles on his tongue, but not of green fields ; it was one about the succulent young pork and potatoes and cabbages and ' the swate wather,' in the far-off days ' way back in county Cork—' the fairest county in all Oireland.' And so on, till the mouths of the survivors ' watered ' at the babbled idea ; and one of them, their only touch of a ' hard case,' began to curse him for the picture he unconsciously drew, and to abjure him to ' hurry up an' get off, if he was goin' ' ; until the mate had brought his soothing influence to bear, and Micky had hoisted his ghostly sails in peace. The ' hard case,' a Liverpool-Yank, had gone next, raving, according to the custom of his kind, and trying to yell snatches of ship's chanties, especially ' Whisky, Johnny,' that sounded unusually coarse yet unearthly over the still, night waters ; though at the back of it all there was a faint glimmering of previous influences, as seen in the word ' chapel,' and some muttering about ' the wrath of the elders.' That was at midnight, in the heavy dew and the pale-yellow glare of a tropic moon that seemed to be worse than the sun had been ; yet the mate had refused to part with the body till broad daylight had shown that Death, indeed, had scuttled it of that load which no man could lift or hold.

“Then came Davy—Davy, the black-bearded little Welshman from the Isle of Dogs, who loved singing and women and sweet Spanish wine even more than he loved preaching (that besetting passion of his countrymen) when he was drunk, and about as much as he did to talk of great Welshmen and his mother’s thatched, little farmstead on the brown hills of Breconshire. And hadn’t Davy died, at noon on the fifth day after the water gave out and the second day after the biscuits were gone, just as a patriotic son of the Principality would like to die anywhere?—singing, if a death-chant could be called singing, that wonderfully-stirring yet hymn-like thing, ‘O land of my fathers.’ Yes, and Davy was Tom’s chum.

“This brought the survivor to Tom, the Bristol-Colonial, with all the colonial sins and perfections thick upon him, unconsciously passing away at his side—the last, the last before himself. He struggled over to him, began to think him already dead; but had his attention drawn off to a commotion in the water close at hand. What the cause of it was he could not say, only guess, from past experience, and that after some time.

“Now the turmoil was great and near by, now at some short distance; then it settled near the raft, and the man saw that his guess was correct—a new finny devil had come on the scene and the one of long-waiting was trying to drive him off. It was a fight for possession of the dead that was to-be.

“The human watcher turned sick at the thought. . . . There they were, struggling and darting and

toothing, their tails swishing from side to side as if in pain, for his companion's shrunk flesh and dried-up skin. Tigers of the waters they were, battling for the poor human prey borne to them over the face of the great waters by a series of terrible happenings.

"Again the man hid his face, groaning as he had never thought to groan in his life.

"Some minutes passed ; then a new interest seized on his weakened senses. He hated the thing that had tortured him so throughout thirty-odd hours, hated it with a holy hatred deeper far than his own strength. He would have given much, had he possessed the much to give, to see that living foulness driven off ; or, better still, to see it float a minute or so a mutilated carcass, then disappear for ever. This thought grew on him. . . .

"He raised his head to watch the struggle, the sounds of which had several times forced a way into his hearing. . . . The battle was now so close that its commotion affected the raft. This fact made the mate seek incidentally for hand-holds on the lashings of the cask, lest the beasts should accidentally strike it and send him off ere his time had come. It did not occur to him that in such a case he could not have held a tenth of his own weight. His thought was a matter of instinct.

"He gazed at the contest, at first in horror at its cause ; then the horrified feeling died away. The man's instinct for sport asserted itself. He felt that he must see how the fight progressed, which side was likely to be the winner. Were they of equal size, or was one bigger than the other ? . . . He was filled

with the older interest as to which would be the victor ; it was the interest of antagonism. It seemed to him that he could easily distinguish the one which had nigh driven him mad since the previous morning—it was so big, so ugly to him, and it would be doubly ferocious.

“Now he saw a great head, with a somewhat pointed snout and a pair of gaping, semi-circular jaws, rush out of the water, then drop back, as if it had missed its object and met with a sudden check. . . . A portion of the wind-calm sea was lashed to froth, mixed with blood in very faint streaks. Through this heaved the rear half of a body, to the thinner part of which hung a ponderous greyish head that was plainly biting off a third of the whole. The vanquished one’s darker head appeared for a moment, in a circular attempt to get at its enemy, the beady eyes turning glazed even as a human’s. . . .

“The turmoil became less. The swirl and foam of the waters bubbled out. The raft stopped its gentle rocking. A little while elapsed. . . . The man re-took possession of his dazed senses, and prayed that both his enemies had died in each other’s jaws. . . . Just as he glanced hopefully at the flecked surface, into which the raft was drifting, a grey, hellish, bloody snout came quite seven or eight inches over the edge of the outer plank. He thought the awful jaws would open and grip the slimy wood ; if so, those innumerable teeth might become locked in the soft substance. He scarcely knew whether to be more terrorized or joyful at the chance. But the fearful minute ended otherwise. The beast had

come only to show himself the victor, come for his meed of applause, come to give notice that he was still at his post.

“The man turned his head from the horrible thing. In that action his gaze once more alighted on the face of his companion. There was death—undeniable dissolution of soul and body, mind and matter, on those features. He drew himself to the corpse, its glazed eyes wide open to that red ball of light now nearing the western horizon. His great, thin hand was slowly thrust under the other’s shirt, till it rested on the skin-covered ribs of this, the sixth victim. . . .

“He must bury the dead—his dead by circumstances, God’s dead by fact—he must bury it. Had he not sworn to them all, when they swore to him to live and die as men, and to cast no lots as to which should die for the others, that if he out-lived them he would put each body forth as its turn came, with a few words of committal and of request for mercy? Thus far he had kept his word strictly, and must keep it now. . . .

“The body seemed to be a fixture, a part of the raft. . . . He tried again . . . and again . . . scarcely knowing what he did. The shark was forgotten. It might, without any resistance, have dragged both the dead and the living off the raft; but it could not reach them. . . . Still the living feebly fingered the dead and feebly thought of his task. . . . Then the sudden night—the heavy, slumbrous night of faint dew and oppressive heat—closed around him, and he remembered no more. . . .

“The morning came, as tropic mornings will;

amber bars smirched quickly over warm pearl that suddenly veiled the whole skirt of night. Then an almost abrupt flush of red, and day was there, with a breeze that bore down a Norwegian brig to see what was meant by the tattered shirt on the flagstaff.

“An hour later her crew properly consigned a body to the deep, and afterwards stood their vessel away east, pleased at having saved one man.”

Naturally enough there was a long and an impressive pause when Shivers finished his story. In the silence, which was almost tangible, I saw him—that big, angular figure, more gaunt than it was then, though much younger—on the raft by his dead shipmate, and the sharks fighting close by them. It was not Shivers on the door-sill that I saw—until he rose again, straight up, as he always did from a seat, and said, “Yes, from year to year there are more awful things afloat than landsmen dream of by the few they hear.” Then away forward he went, noiseless on the iron deck; and I stole away aft, there to lean on the rail, looking at the cotton-seed sheds in brilliant moonlight, incidentally hearing now and then a bugle-call that broke softly—because of distance—on the warm, slumbrous night, yet never with a thought or an eye for anything within sight or hearing. After awhile I returned to the galley, and, in between irregular prowls about the decks, to see that all was well, there I wrote the story down.

Not until we were back in Alexandria did anything happen out of the usual, miserable routine, except that it grew steadily worse. Then, owing to the

drastic condition of things (even Shivers was wishing devoutly that he could find a satisfactory means of being paid-off), I took my R.N.R. certificate and went aboard the English man-of-war that was lying in harbour. I had a notion—foolish and Utopian in a way—that some redress might be had there, such as we ought to have been able to procure from the authorities on shore. Of course, short of open mutiny on our part, the captain could not interfere; probably he thought that I was a queer sort of customer to ask such a thing. However, officialdom apart, he was human enough to give me his sympathy, and to send back with me a subordinate to inquire, in an unofficial way, into our case. The result being, as was certain to be, that I became a particularly-marked man; all the same, for one reason or another, the oppressors dared not go beyond petty acts of spite and tyranny.

But my release was at hand. While we were preparing the cargo-gear, just before entering Marseilles again, I strained myself in a way that compelled me to lay up. By the mates this was dubbed “wash-deck fever” on the following morning—*i.e.* malingering. Ginger came to drag me out of my bunk; but the silent appearance of Shivers in the doorway, added to my threats of what would happen later on if he touched me, sent him aft—swearing what he would do were he free-handed. When he had gone, the bo’sun came to my side and said, “If either of them come that game, shout—some one will be handy.”

And out he went, too; but while he spoke, I had seen in the old man’s eyes the same fire as

I saw there when he knocked the Cossack down at Taganrog. Requests to be allowed to see a doctor were answered that evening by my arrest for "refusing duty." After three days in the prison on the hill beyond the old harbour, I was haled before the consul. There my representations, backed by the production of that certificate, procured me an examination by a doctor, after which I was offered freedom, with my money up-to-date. I took the offer, went on board, packed my effects, and said good-bye to my shipmates—not forgetting Denis and Dicky, and sorry especially to leave Merton and Shivers behind, in the very port where I had last left my former and greater friend Shells. That afternoon I began my journey across France, singing in my heart the old chanty :

Leave her, Johnny, leave her—

Leave her, Johnny.

The times are hard, and the wages low,

So it's time for you to leave her!

THE END

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